

# RISE OF THE VALKYRIE



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DAKOTA FRANDSEN

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First Printing, 2025

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## Chapter 1

# Hope...

It has been a week since the funeral. Dakota has barely been able to act the same since the exorcism, and to be honest neither have I. Somehow we managed to stick together through this mess, but little did we know that a much more significant mess was coming our way. I should've known that it was only the beginning of a much more massive storm.

Kristen White and Macy Delevign committed suicide about a week after the exorcism of Sydney Grimm, both citing the event as the reason behind their harsh actions. Macy Snider also tried to kill herself but was caught and resuscitated before it was too late. She is spending time, along with Sydney Grimm, in a mental institution until further notice. A cop looking into the incident also died due to suspicious circumstances, though we think it was unrelated to the event.

Kristen and Delevign cut their wrists and hung themselves while Snider overdosed on pain meds and

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drowned herself in the tub. Because the families knew their deaths were tied, a joint funeral with Dakota being kind enough to speak at the ceremony was planned out. The families held up pretty well during the entirety of it, especially since both received 6-hour old messages online by the time their bodies were discovered. I remember his speech almost verbatim.

“Some of you, by now, have probably heard the rumors that I was involved in the exorcism both of these beautiful ladies claimed was the reason behind their choice to leave this world,” he said, “In respect of the souls in which now hide in the shadows to watch over their loved ones they left behind, to the others involved and for the sake of those whose tears shall grant for a better future, be it in this life or the next, I will neither confirm or deny these allegations. All I will say is that I've seen enough of the lights inside their eyes to know that this sunset shall end with a starry night.

“It is no secret that many who knew Kristen didn't like her personality, but yet many still respected her. Perhaps it was due to the fact everyone on some level knew that Kristen was still in pain from the loss of her older brother. That alone showed that she might have had walls around her, once she let you in, her love was so profound that every part of her had some hand in holding it together. Being able to feel so much love for someone like that is such a rare gift that many would consider it a curse.



“Macy, on the other hand, took the opposite approach for what she loved. She embraced the world as it was and tried to see the best in everything; if she had a hard time finding that good, it seemed like there was no extent she was willing to ignore to help it become better. She genuinely cared about everyone that knew her, and everyone cared about her as if she was their sister. She had the potential to take on any cause she wanted to change the world and make enough of an impact to last centuries.

“Both of these souls are a true loss to this world, and tonight we say not goodbye but rather, 'see you later,' for in time we shall see them again.”

I could barely hold myself together during it all. Dakota's words were kind, but the whole thought of the funeral altogether bothered me, just knowing I was part of the reason they were dead. I know it wasn't my fault but... I just don't know. The entire thing was just confusing. The more cases Dakota took me on, the more worried I became. I tried to help with getting cases; then one came along that brought back more of my hell. One of the ghosts from my past, Alice Greene, suddenly came back into my life after being slaughtered like a pig by some sick fucking psychopath.

Richard Simon, a warehouse warden who had a secret basement he violated and maimed several girls until their bodies became cheap horror movie decorations. That son of a bitch kidnapped and attacked one of my best friends, Jessica Summers, as you would've

known if you read Dakota's book. But, before I go too far, let me start from the beginning.

On June 20th, 2011, Brianna watched as Jessica was kidnapped as they were getting out of a summer school program, to get ahead in their school credits. Dakota hated school, so the very thought of doing summer programs for anything other than what he was working on at the time was out of the question. But it was nice to spend time with him without lugging around textbooks. I tried to encourage him to expand the horizons of the "group" since more and more people started to join us on cases. One thing I tried to push was using a supernatural assist to help find missing people. He kept shooting the idea down, getting madder each time I mentioned it. I would ask him why he kept saying he wasn't going to deal with putting lives at risk when he would get something wrong.

Regardless, when Jessica went missing, the big guy was needed. It was common for Dakota to be often used as a one-man construction crew because of his size, but few people knew about his eye for detail. He could probably see something others couldn't. In fact, I knew he could, but as Dakota made it clear in his book, he was still very much against the idea. Come July 17th; he didn't get much choice.

I went to visit Brianna just to check on her; she was a horrible mess. There was a park near the mall she would always visit whenever she felt upset, and Jessica or I would usually find ourselves walking her out with

bribes of sad movies and chocolate ice cream. I could always see her practically in the same spot each time I had to go. When Jessica went missing, Brianna was worried to the point of physical illness - bone thin, skin almost ghostly white, the areas around her eyes nearly entirely black, it didn't help she started using drugs a couple of days after Jessica went missing.

My mom dropped me off at the park so I could find her. All I had to do was follow the literal trail of tears to see her.

"Is there anything on Jessica?" I asked her.

She shook her head in silence. I sat next to her to try and comfort her, but couldn't do anything to help her.

"How long has it been?" I asked.

"Three weeks. No one knows whether or not she is dead," Brianna whined.

"Bri, you can't think like that. Jessica will be okay; she will survive this. You know it just as well as I do that she will make it. You have to have faith."

"No, I don't know I can, Shandra! I can't take this, anymore, I just can't!"

"Listen, I know someone who can probably help find her, but I need your permission to get him to help us."

"What do you mean?"

"I know someone who can help find Jessica; he isn't a cop or anything like that. He is someone cops go to for help on cases like this."

"Like what?"

"When things get desperate, he has been known to help turn things around. He has yet to lose anyone."

"I don't know, but I'll try anything. Is it some old guy?"

"No, he's our age. He's my boyfriend, the one that helped me get away from my step-dad."

"No possible way, how can someone our age do that?"

"He is an interesting guy. His name is Dakota, and he's..."

"Wait, is this 'Dakota' the big one?"

"Yep, that'll be him. I thought I told you that was his name."

"Go ahead and get him. I'd trust him with this more than anyone else."

"Okay, I'll let him know."

I pulled out my phone and started texting Dakota information about what was going on. At first, I tried to word it like I was just needing advice on handling a friend's problem and would try anything he recommended to help. After a couple of minutes, I asked him to give me a call to pitch the case. Immediately my phone rang, showing a photo of Dakota, I took while on our only Bigfoot case we did in the mountains. He knew where a possible family of Sasquatch was located and took me up to "introduce" me to them, and the photo is one I took when he spotted a juvenile trying to spy on us. But that case doesn't matter anymore.

"Hello," I answered.

"Hey, it's me," Dakota replied, "What's going on over there?"

"Listen, I think I got us a case. But I'm not sure about what is happening."

"Okay, just tell me what you know,, and we will go from there."

"Alright," I whispered, "Like I already told you, a friend of mine has been looking for her sister who was kidnapped a couple of weeks ago. Police have come up with nothing at all and are coming close to calling off the search. She is worried sick that the worst has happened."

"That is not good. But it has nothing to do with what I do. I can maybe put out a few notices online, but that is it."

"I know, I know. But look I thought we could do something more than that to help out. I hate to see her like this."

"Shandra, if you're talking about having me use my gifts to look into it, you have to remember some things can go terribly wrong in the process. I don't want an innocent death on my conscience!"

"I know, but please, Dakota, we have to do something to help. I can't just hold back everything knowing that there is a way to help people when all else fails. I need to do SOMETHING to help her!"

Dakota paused for a moment. I could hear his pulse from his temples start pressing against his phone. I

knew I was getting through to him - even when he was absolutely pig-headed, I had ways to swing him in my favor. He had all these rules he would follow when he needed to put up a fight, many of which I knew I would be breaking by bringing this up.

"Alright," he sighed, "I will see what I can do. But we all need to meet in person."

"I kinda figured you would say that. We are at Lincoln Park, just across the street from the mall. Please hurry."

"Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Be careful. I love you."

"Love you too."

The second my phone turned off, I could hear engines screaming nearby. A drag racing ring was in town, so at first, I thought it was one of them. Further small explosions and a large dark figure walking up to us, however, unveiled a much more dangerous race was taking place. Sides of Dakota even he was afraid of would emerge, the very things he was scared would show and scare me away. I'll be honest, parts of me wondered if I should've left him after this happened, knowing that sometime soon I would be bound to him by the time Olivia was born. Dakota could've easily turned against me and become just like my step-father, but it was a risk I was willing to take to help my friends. But I knew that leaving him could take Olivia away, or maybe replace her with a new kid; I don't know...

"Hello, Brianna, it has been a while," whispered a familiar voice.

Brianna and I both look up to see Dakota standing over us,

"Dakota. What... are you doing here?" asked Brianna.

"Shandra told me I needed to come by to help. Though she never really indicated it was you I'd be helping, not that it matters right now."

"Okay... but what can you do to help? The cops can barely do anything."

"A few things, believe it or not."

"Brianna," I whispered, "You need to let him help you. He can do things that no other person can. I've seen it for myself."

"What does she mean, Dakota?" Bri asked.

Dakota got down on one knee and braced his arm against his still standing leg to hold up his weight. He started trying to dig into her mind to "sway" her into being more cooperative. "Do you remember why we broke up?" he asked.

"No," Brianna moaned, "You never gave me a reason. You just kinda disappeared."

"I disappeared 'cause I felt things between you and I would be short-lived, plus it never really felt like you supported me in any of my ideas. Many of which brought me here."

"Dakota, you kept saying that you had all of these powers and I said you should've been medicated. All of your ideas were insanity!"

"Let's just say I wasn't telling you everything and what I kept from you has gotten stronger. I kept pursuing all of what I had talked about and more."

"I don't care anymore. Can you find Jessica?"

"Stick out your hands, and we'll see."

Dakota's once arched back stood up straight as both of his hands approached Brianna's as if to ask for a dance. Brianna was reluctant to grab onto Dakota's hand until she saw my head nod in encouragement. I watched as Dakota's eyes twitched as his tired eyelids focused the mess in Brianna's mind. Almost instantaneously, he looked like he witnessed the entire event. His fists started to clench.

"The license plate you saw was 2-T-3-6-I-G-D, right?" he asked

"Yeah.. how... did you..." Brianna whined.

"No time to explain," Dakota interrupted, "Who is the officer that responded?"

"Jerome, why?"

Dakota's fists clenched tighter, summoning storm clouds above our heads. He was getting pissed. He stopped breathing as every muscle in his body seemed to tighten and grow. The look in his eyes was dark, making the tired blue pools in his eyes blacken. No stars would appear in his eyes to show hope for a new day, but rather the smog and muzzle flashes of war burned the whites of his eyes dark red.

"I think I might be able to pull some strings to get her back," Dakota replied.



"I don't care what you do, just get her back," cried Brianna.

"Will do," Dakota growled.

Dakota started to march away, but I had to speak up before he left. I knew something about the person that took Jessica.

"Dakota, please... please, please be careful," I begged him.

"Shandra, don't worry. We already know that I make it out of this alive. Our daughter is enough proof of that."

"No, you don't understand! About two years ago a friend of mine was taken, almost exactly like the way Jessica was taken."

"What happened to her?"

"About a week later they found her body. Whoever... they... just please don't do this!"

I lost control. Dakota was about to sign his execution order and not even care. I couldn't feel the connection we had to one another, the one that let me inside his mind. It was like he was a total stranger, with lead barriers surrounding him. I couldn't help but collapse thinking that I was going to lose him, and Olivia.

"I have to do this. There are still many things about me you don't know yet."

"Please, Dakota, I don't care about that stuff. It is too dangerous."

I felt his hand gently lay on the back of my head. Feeling like a movie in a DVD player, I could feel him

searching my mind for the moment that I feared would have already happened to Jessica, and what I thought would happen to him if he went through with it. He quickly found the information on the day I found out my old friend Alice was horrifically murdered.

The second I felt the sensation of Dakota digging through my mind faded, I had to ask him if he saw it happen.

"Yeah, now I get why you don't want me to go," he answered

"You're still going, aren't you?" I moaned.

"Whoever is doing this needs to be stopped, you just gave me more reasons why," he answered.

I knew I wouldn't be able to talk him out of it. That stubborn ass (I love him, but I'll admit he can be an ass at times) wasn't going to be easily swayed, and likely get himself killed in the process. I couldn't stop him, and on some level, I didn't want to stop him.

"Just be careful, okay?" I whispered, "I don't want to lose you."

Dakota kneeled down before me with a gentle smile on his face and whispered, "I don't plan on dying today."

He stood up and walked away - not before mouthing a goodbye.

"I am going to take Brianna home, and wait until you get back with Jessica," I mind-messed him, "You will get her back."

"Don't focus on me, too much. I love you Shandra, and you know I'll get her back," he responded.

"Dakota, don't... I'm barely able to handle this as is."

"Fine, I'll see you later..."

Dakota hurried to his car and drove off. I still don't know what all happened, other than the bits of information Dakota mentioned in his book. All I remember is how afraid I was for Dakota; afraid of losing him, afraid of losing Olivia, afraid of losing a family...

"Are you okay, Shandra?" Brianna asked.

"Yeah, I am just worried..."

"Don't worry, Dakota will be alright. He promised he is going to check on me later."

"Yeah, I'm sure Jess will be too. We should get out of here."

"Where do we go? There is nothing we can do to help the situation."

"You're right. There is nothing we can do, but let's get you home so when Jessica is found, we will be there for her. Chances are we will have to wait a little longer for Dakota. I have a feeling both of them are going to need us when this is over."

Without any else to say, Brianna got up and started to walk home. I followed her, and stayed as close to her as I could, given the circumstances. I tried everything I could to keep her in good spirits, during the grueling hours that passed by. I could almost hear the commotion in the distance of what could be considered the first act of Dakota's Dynasty.

Brianna and Jessica's house had a sort of country house feel to it. Rose bushes twirled through the foundation of the building, yet strengthening it. It was like a garden fairy's shelter, almost looking unreal. I helped Brianna walk inside, as she was starved and lethargic from her worries. Whatever drugs she got into, didn't help the situation.

"What do you think is happening now? With Koda and Jess?" she questioned.

I focused on that thought as much as I could. The very idea of Dakota brought feelings of adrenaline and rage with hints of panic and guilt. Whatever he was doing was splitting his mind into two. On the one hand, he was a warrior willing to lay down his life to save Jessica - on the other; he was afraid of dying and wanting to run off. It isn't much of a stretch to tell you which guy usually won.

Anytime I tried to contact him through telepathy; a sharp jolt would nearly paralyze me. He was making sure I couldn't see something, and in retrospect, I am glad I wasn't able to get through to him. But no matter what, his silence at the time set me on edge. I didn't have any confirmation from Olivia to know that he was okay, nothing.

To try and divert our worries, Brianna and I pulled up any movie we could find online and started cleaning up all of the sweets in the neighborhood. Several people delivered flowers and gift baskets to try to be supportive of Jessica's family while she was missing. Many

of the same neighbors who would've called the cops on the girls when their outdoor heating unit turned on.

Hours, or what seemed like years, passed before an update appeared that settled our troubled minds. Three heavy knocks on the front door scared the shit out of us, causing us to fly through the roof; Brianna was too distraught to answer the door, and her parents were at work since they were in a tight spot financially to take time off, so I went to the door. Once I opened it, officer Jerome stood on the front porch with Jessica wrapped underneath his arm.

"Jessica! Oh my god!" I screeched.

"Take it easy, Shandra. She's been through Hell," Jerry mentioned.

Brianna walked in behind me and started to cry at the sight of her. Jessica slipped from Jerome's arm to comfort her worried sister. Neither of them wanted to move from each other's comfort and barely spoke a word to each other as they walked into the house. I stared at them, relieved that my friend has come home, but fearing the worst.

"She'll be alright, Shandra. I doubt she could ever fully recover from this, but she'll be okay," Jerome whispered.

"It isn't her I am worried about," I sighed, "Where's Dakota?"

"Why don't you come outside for a minute?"

I followed Officer Jerome to the middle of the yard before he turned to face me, mentally preparing to hear

any news he could tell me about Dakota. At this point, I was willing to take the story he was killed by the person that hurt Jessica so that I knew it was all over.

I wonder if this was how my mom felt when she was waiting for news on my dad...

"Listen, Shandra," Jerome sighed, "The situation with Dakota has gotten a bit complicated. Now, what I am about to tell you could get me in a lot of trouble. But, with everything that has happened, I think this is something you need to hear."

"What is it?" I worriedly asked.

"The man who kidnapped Jessica... he's dead. Dakota killed him," Jerome answered, "It is hard to tell now, but it looks as if Dakota broke several of his bones and shot him at least five times. Because of how bad the damage was, Dakota's been taken in."

I couldn't speak, and my heart sank. That was not Dakota. Dakota was not a killer.

"He'll be okay; it isn't what you think. The people that took Dakota in, they know about his situation and will do what they can to make sure he won't be affected by this."

"What the hell does that even mean?! What is going on with Dakota? Did he get hurt?"

"Shandra, just stay calm. Dakota is fine. These people are just concerned about him."

"Why would they need to be concerned?"

"You know about the situation with Dakota's father?"

"Yeah, he told me shortly after we met..."

"Guys who come out of that situation, tend to become serial killers," Jerry interrupted, "Many of the experts seem to think that stuff like comes from them wanting to do something about their parents, to stop them from hurting others, and it transfers into adulthood. Some go as far as saying it is a possibility that the urge to kill won't ever go away until the person that caused them the pain is dead. These people know Dakota fits into this a little too well."

"What will they do to him?"

"Nothing, Don't worry. They're just going to make sure he isn't too affected by what happened. They don't want him to turn on you, or anyone else unless it becomes absolutely necessary. I can't say much more about it," he vaguely answered, "I've got to get out of here, but keep an eye on Jessica for me. She could use some friends right now."

Jerry hurried to his car. I had to stop and think, about everything. Something didn't feel right about all of this. It was apparent I wasn't being told everything. The more I tried to understand what Jerry had told me, the more and more uneasy I felt. I also began to feel like I needed to do something to help Dakota. But there was nothing I could do, except wait. The look in Jessica's eyes was enough for me to tell it was better I sit things out.

Hours later, I had the idea to go outside for a few moments of air, praying that Dakota's car would be

parked just outside. I wasn't going to be that lucky. I tried to give him a call on his cell, just to help ease my sanity. The phone kept ringing, and I thought I was going to hit voicemail yet again.

"Hello?" asked a tired Dakota.

"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!" I screamed.

Dakota paused. "What do you mean?"

"Dakota, I have been trying to call you for the last five hours. Jessica came home, and she told us that you would check on her, but we never heard a single word from you!"

Another pause. I could hear Dakota mumbling under his breath, but I couldn't make out anything he was saying.

"Fed... in...gate me," he said through static.

"What?" I asked him, "Dakota, you're breaking up. Can you just come here? I need to see you, we all need to see you."

"Alright, I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Please!"

I hung up. I was pissed at him for taking so long to answer the phone, but I still cared about him. I just wanted to see him. The front door opened up behind me, and Brianna stepped out.

"He's coming," I said, "Dakota's on his way."

"Good. Are you feeling any better of it?" she asked.

"A little, knowing everyone made it out okay. I just can't believe what all is happening, and to be honest, I get this feeling it isn't over yet."



“Shandra, everything is going to be fine. We’re all on edge, just come inside and wait for Dakota to get here. He won’t stray far knowing something is bothering you, trust me.”

“You’re right.”

I followed Brianna inside. I noticed Jessica walk into her room, looking even more tired than before. Brianna and I didn’t bother her; she had been through enough without people trying to interrogate her about what happened. The things she must’ve seen...

A familiar car engine purring just outside the house caught my attention. I peeked outside and saw Dakota’s car pull up. He looked like he was talking to someone that was with him in the car but I didn’t see anyone. I thought I saw weird... doppelgangers near him that disappeared quickly. As soon as Dakota got out of the car, I felt like I was being lifted off the ground and thrown to him. The next moment, I had him pinned to the ground. I was sitting on his stomach; my limbs draped over his body. He started to mumble, but I slapped him.

“Nice to see you too,” he joked.

“What happened to you?” I asked, pissed.

“The government found out about me and took me to some weird facility,” he answered, “I was drugged the entire time.”

“Don’t lie to me!”

"I am not lying to you, Shandra. Check my neck, whoever took me had to drug me to move me anywhere. And it was some pretty heavy stuff."

Dakota adjusted his neck to show me two mosquito bite looking bumps on the bottom of his jaw. I started feeling like a bitch.

"Will you be okay?" I asked him.

"Yeah," he moaned, "It was just something to make me a bit sleepy."

Feeling guilty, and just glad he was in my reach, I had to kiss him one more time. Just to feel his pulse quiver his lips against mine when the moment seemed to drag into pure pleasurable bliss. The one tender moment I started to feel that sensation, I lifted my head for a few moments of air and moaned, "I was so worried about you," before continuing with the kiss. Something in Dakota's touch, as his arms wrapped around me, told me he needed this moment more than I did. Our lips separated again and our eyes locked before I laid my head against his chest. He started to trace a heart against my temple. His surprisingly tender touch was something I thought I was never going to have again.

"I know," he whispered, "But don't worry, no matter what happens, I will always find a way back here to you."

I kissed him one more time before letting him get up. I stood aside as he looked at the house and found Brianna in the doorway.

"Thank you for finding her," she whispered.

"You're welcome," Dakota grunted, "Is she okay?"

"Yeah, she's alright considering everything that happened," Bri answered, "She's in her room right now."

I followed Dakota into the house as Brianna stood aside to let us in. I watched Dakota's eyes map out the house as he walked towards Jessica's bedroom. Brianna and I never bothered to ask Jessica about what happened, so having Dakota there would help ease our curiosity. When he got to her doorway, he stopped just before the dusty darkness that was inside. Small hair-like particles could be seen floating in the beams of sunlight that broke through the curtains. Dakota knocked twice on the door to catch Jessica's attention.

"Jessica, it's me," Dakota whispered, "I thought I'd come by and check on you."

I thought I saw Jessica shift on her bed when she heard his voice. It was hard to see her at all in the dark-room, with only bright pink pillow reflecting the tiny shreds of sunlight that came into the air. The room started to feel tense as Jessica realized Dakota had arrived.

"How are you holding up?" he asked.

"Fine," Jessica whispered.

She turned her head to the side. Wet tear stains lined up with Jess's bloodshot eyes.

"Jess, it's okay to talk. I saw what happened."

"No, you didn't. You didn't see what was down there."

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't see them. You didn't see their faces as they died. You didn't see the pain in their eyes when that guy would start grabbing us. There was something down there that watched. When one of us couldn't take it anymore, something was there to take us away. Something evil."

"Were they the ones growling when I killed the sick fuck that did this to you?"

Jessica adjusted herself further so she could see Dakota better. Apparently, she wasn't aware of his ... powers.

"How... how did you hear them?" she asked.

"Things have changed, since the last time we saw each other. I see things that other people can't see and quite frankly it is just the tip of the iceberg."

"Is that how you found me?"

Dakota nodded his head, "I get these visions. Sometimes they show me the future; sometimes they help me look into the past. I have a hard time controlling it, but when they happen, it is always something important."

Jessica sat up and moved next to Dakota. Somehow Dakota was starting to make her feel better about the ordeal.

"But why me?" Jess asked.

"Grab my hand, and we will see," Dakota said, holding out his left hand.

Jessica grabbed the hovering hand and squeezed. Dakota's eyes started to twitch. His mind began to get

images, probably of the future, I tried to dig into what he was seeing but had no luck,

“What is it, Dakota?” Jessica asked.

“Well,” he sighed, “It looks like you might be needed in a few years.”

“Good to know,” Jessica said as she smiled and wrapped her arms around Dakota before she whispered, “Thanks... thank you for everything.”

“Hey, you’re finally up,” Bri cheered as Dakota returned the hug.

“Thanks to Dakota,” Jessica smiled.

“Yeah,” I laughed, “He can work miracles if you let him.”

Dakota started to blush. It was nice to see everyone smiling, even Jessica. We all spent the next few hours, or what felt like seconds, catching up on lost time until Jessica and Brianna’s parents showed up. Brianna had called them earlier to reveal the good news, but it took them about three hours to get home from Salt Lake. An anonymous tip told them that Jessica was spotted near her grandparent’s house, causing them to check it out personally. Of course, it was a pointless trip.

When they got home, the emotions that run can only be compared to coming home videos featuring soldiers. A family was reunited after a tragic event. Scott and Natalie Summers got to see their eldest daughter alive. When they crashed through the front door, there was no stopping them.

“Jessica!” they both wailed, “Are you here?”

Jessica tackled her parents. Brianna soon followed her to join her family group hug. Dakota took me under his arm as we admired the picture perfect moment. I even took out my phone to capture the joyous reunion. It felt amazing to be a part of it. It took a few moments before Mrs. Summers gained enough courage to ask the one question most parents in their situation would. The police were honest about their suspicions of Simon, not a usual tactic.

"Jess, I thought weren't going to see you again," she whimpered, "How did you get away?"

"Dakota.... Dakota came for me," she answered, "The guy that took me is also dead."

Mr. and Mrs. Summers lifted their heads to find Dakota and I standing back and admiring the scenery. They both started to wipe their eyes before mustering up a "thanks," for the guy that brought their daughter home.

"Dakota, long time no see," Mr. Summers smiled, "How you been?"

"Doing alright, I'm just glad Jessica made it," Dakota answered.

"Thanks to you," Jessica added.

"Yes, thank you, Dakota," Mrs. Summers said, "You've helped keep this family whole for some time."

"I am just doing what anybody would. And I would love to stay and catch up some more, but I do need to go take care of a couple of things so I should get going."

"Yeah, but before you go, I need to talk to you about something," Mr. Summers said.

Mr. Summers followed Dakota outside. I could overhear the conversation between them through Dakota's telepathy. Somehow it was inspirational.

"Hey Dakota, I honestly can't thank you enough for helping Jessica," Nathan said, "But I have to ask you something, something I'm a bit embarrassed to ask."

"Go ahead, Nate," Dakota said, "It's the least I can do."

"I hate to ask but, I know you're into that supernatural stuff, why do you think Jessica survived? The odds for her to come back home were near impossible!"

"You and I know that Jessica is too stubborn to go down easily. Likely she gets that from you."

"More her mother, but don't tell them I said that. What I meant was, is there any special meaning behind why she would've survived? If the situation was half as bad as it looked, well, I was starting to guarantee I was going to lose my daughters."

"Mr. Summers, there is no direct answer to that. Maybe she got lucky, or maybe she is meant to do something later in life. It is hard to say."

"Well, what do you think it is in Jessica's case?"

Dakota took a moment to think about his answer. The words that followed sprouted from a singular thought in his head, "hope."

"In Jessica's case, it is a point I try to emphasize for a lot of the girls I help. The reason why they would

have survived is not only due to the fact they had the strength to, but that they have the strength to help others going through similar fates.

"I only caught a glimpse of the things Jessica saw down there, and to be honest, I never thought she would be able to take on something that horrible. But, she did. She may look fine, but there are scars on her that may never heal, but the fact she had that much willpower shows that she is capable of doing extraordinary things.

"Maybe that is the reason she is still alive; she has yet to accomplish what she is capable of doing in this lifetime. To be honest, I hope that our friendship lasts long enough for me to see it. It is a messed up world, and Jessica is about to give people hope. Just keep an eye on her, she went through a lot, and it would be near impossible for gods to stay the same after seeing what Jessica saw. I'll stick around to help keep an eye on her, just in case, but I believe she will overcome this."

Tears started to sprinkle my eyes. Both Jessica and Brianna saw the beads as they hugged my cheeks and smiled as if they also heard Dakota's kind words. He was right; the fact Jessica survived what she did gave us all hope for the future. But it wasn't long before the hints of faith that held our hearts were distracted by a new tragedy.



## Chapter 2

### ...LOST

Jessica's dad and Dakota bro-hugged it out just before Nathan walked back into the house. But, for some reason, there was one thing that kept bugging me about the whole ordeal. Dakota flat out refusing to help find Jessica when I went to him about it. When I was outside, I saw Dakota start to walk away as a wind gust stirred up around us. From the tiny slivers of his eyes, a look of total focus and rage began to boil. Something was on his mind, and I couldn't help but wonder if it was because of me.

"Hey, can we talk for a minute?" I asked him.

"Sure," he whispered, "What's on your mind?"

"Not like you can't tell for yourself, can't you?" I joked.

"Most days I could, but I am still trying to process everything."

"I bet. So, despite that, is everything alright?"

"Yeah, it's fine."

"Are you sure? I'd understand why you'd be upset now but when I asked for your help earlier but... you seemed kinda ticked."

"It's nothing, Shandra; I wouldn't worry about it."

I don't know why I started to feel enraged at him when he gave me that response. I knew something was up and I wanted answers. I wasn't going to let him off. Maybe it was because the way he acted reminded me of my old boyfriends before they would turn on me. For the first time in my life, I felt like fighting back. My fists started to clench, and the wind grew stronger as if I was controlling it somehow.

"DAKOTA, don't you lie to me!" I screamed.

Thunder fired off the moment I raised my voice, making Dakota jump in response.

"Shandra, I am not lying!" he yelled.

I could sense his heartbeat racing just as fast as mine. Dakota's big pig-head started to show and it very well brushed off on me.

"Yes, you are!" I yelled, "Tell me what is wrong!"

"FINE!" he roared, "You want to know what is wrong?"

Dakota started to bite his lip to the point of skin starting to break. I was so invested in this fight, I blurted, "I'm waiting!"

"You asking me to find Jessica," he whispered.

"What the HELL are you talking about?" I asked, "Really? Is he going to use Jessica for this fight? ASS-HOLE!"

"The only reason I even came is that I knew it was the Summers you were talking about on the phone. If it were anybody else, I wouldn't have come."

"Why?! If someone needed our help you wouldn't step up? WHAT THE HELL, Dakota?! I thought that was the whole point of the paranormal thing we do!"

"Shandra, these things aren't always accurate and could get someone killed! I can't even tell how many were dead when I got there!"

"So what?! When someone comes to us for help, we fucking help them!"

"I know, and I would help anybody who needed it but not like this. I killed a man tonight!"

"So what?! That sick bastard deserved everything you gave him and more!"

"I can't keep doing this. I would do anything to help Jessica, Brianna, and especially you! I don't want to place myself in the public eye like that!"

"What do you mean? Psychics tell people about dead relatives on television all the time!"

"Really? THAT is your argument?! Those morons get things wrong all the time, and everything they supposedly see can be found with an internet search! When they say somebody who was reported missing is dead, they are making assumptions off of nothing!"

"Don't you talk to me like that! You know what I mean!"

"Yeah, I think I do, but I don't have time for this, I have to be somewhere."

"Fine, go! I don't care anymore!"

"Fine!"

Dakota and I stormed away from each other. There was a yank at my heartstrings as we kept moving farther apart. He got into his car and started to drive away. My head began to rush because I was so pissed. Jessica and Brianna came out to find out what was going on. But what made things worse, was a voice that whispered in my ear.

*'Dakota will die. For he is the son of Elimination.'*

*'What?'*

*'Dakota will die.'*

Jessica and Brianna's hands wrapped around me from behind. The voices in my head stopped talking when Olivia appeared in front of me. She just stood there with tears that nearly matched mine before disappearing. My heart began to race; my daughter was not going to have a chance be born if this went too far. I had to do something about this because Dakota was going to be too stubborn to make the first move. I sank to my knees in fear of what was to come.

"Shandra, what just happened?!" Jessica asked.

"Dakota is going to get himself killed..." I whispered

"What? What do you mean?" Brianna added.

"Dakota is going to do something to hurt himself," I cried, "I need to call him now!"

"Well do it," Jessica encouraged, "I don't know what happened to you two but if Dakota is about to do

something stupid you need to talk him out of it! He'll listen to you."

"No he won't, not after this! I've never seen him get that angry. I was scared he would do something," I explained.

"Scared of him? Dakota won't hurt you, Shandra, if you tell him what's going on! It's about Alice, ain't it?" Jessica asked.

I nodded.

"Just tell him," Jess insisted, "He'll listen."

My phone slipped out of my pocket when I dropped to my knees and laid next to me as if it was waiting for me to call him. I picked it up and began to dial. Pressing the outline of my phone case against my ear, I listened to what felt like an eternal chorus of taunting laughter. It felt like I was being mocked. Dakota let my call go to voicemail, adding to the guilt that started to tear into my chest. When the automated lady finished talking, I had to let go of everything I needed to say.

"Dakota," I whimpered, "I'm so sorry about yelling at you like that. I'm so sorry about the fight. I know it can probably be hard for you to handle what happened with Jessica. I know it can be hard for you to see that happen, and you probably don't want to hear from me right now but please listen and try to understand..."

Jessica and Brianna tried to help by whispering anything they could think of to encourage me to keep going but seeing Olivia was what helped me keep going.

"... I know you saw what happened to my friend after the guy that took Jessica found her. I just... I just didn't want to lose you like that. I ... I want to keep spending time with you and keep moving forward. I know that times are going to be rough, but I don't care. I want to see you, soon. Just don't leave what we have, don't throw this away... please. I can't lose you now; I just can't! If not for me, then for Olivia. I want to meet her someday, and I know you want to as well. Just, please, I need to see you soon! I'm so sorry for everything, just please see me. I love you," I cried.

Faintly, another voice suddenly appeared near my phone, one I knew would get through to Dakota. "Daddy, please talk to Mommy," Olivia whispered.

I hung up the phone and sank to the growing weight in my chest. The girls both started to cry after hearing my heart spill for Dakota.

"That.. was beautiful, Shandra," Jessica choked, "But who is Olivia?"

"Olivia..." I whispered, "Olivia is mine and Dakota's daughter."

Tears turned to shock.

"What?" Brianna gasped.

"Let's just go inside before you explain, maybe get some ice cream," Jessica suggested, "There's too much excitement today."

The girls and I walked back into the house, straight into the kitchen and grabbed as much ice cream we could find. This became a ritual for when one of us had

issues with guys, and to be honest; this wasn't the first time Dakota was the guy we were bashing.

Sitting down for our therapy session with Ben & Jerry; Jessica paired up with a strawberry blend, Brianna hit a rocky road, I took in a vanilla blend. Our spoons starting to dig in at once, and everyone's heads began to focus on the bit I let slip about Olivia.

"Shandra, are you... did you... with Dakota?" Jess asked.

"No," I whispered, "Not yet at least."

"Then how do you two have a daughter?" she asked.

I glanced over to Brianna to see why she was so quiet. Her heavy brown eyes were fixed on me the entire time, with an endless barrage of questions rolling through her head. It almost felt like she knew what I was going to say. I took a deep breath and mentally prepared myself for the questioning both sisters were going to put me through.

"It's hard to explain, and you'd probably think I was crazy. I thought I was too when it happened. The only thing that helped me think I wasn't was..."

"Dakota saw her too," Brianna interrupted.

I nodded.

"But, how is that possible?" Jessica inquired.

"I don't know. The only way Dakota can think of is some freaky time travel."

"Well is there anything this girl, Olivia, told you two about how she was able to do it? Did she only appear

once? Does she talk to anyone else?" Jessica continued to ask.

"She's made appearances several times, for both me and Dakota. In fact, she was with us when we went out to the lake. She's in a couple of the photos!"

Brianna jerks out her phone and starts to examine the screen thoroughly. "I KNEW I saw a face there!" she screamed.

She held her phone out, pointing to a light blue spot right behind Dakota and me as we were lounging in the lake. That was right where Olivia was and, with enough eye focus, that was where her face was revealed. Jessica stared in amazement.

"Shandra, she's beautiful," Jessica mumbled.

"Thanks, she is," I cried, "And I want nothing more in the world than to get to meet her."

Both Brianna and Jessica leaned in to give me another hug.

"You will get that chance," Brianna whispered, "You just have to wait it out."

"Trust us, Shandra," Jessica added, "Dakota always finds a way to make up for his mistakes."

As if to alarm us of what was to come, a Chihuahua puppy from next door started to bark intensively. Brianna and I brushed it off, but Jessica became suspicious of the commotion.

"Hey, why don't you two get a movie started up? Something to help get our minds off of the drama. I'll



go check to see what Rocket Jr. is yapping at," she suggested.

Bri and I shrugged it off and cradled our ice cream as we started looking for some movie to watch. For some reason the internet connection was spotty so streaming something online was out of the question. I found an old rom-com titled, "Promises of Paris," and suggested it to Brianna. My eyes started to fixate on the credits section on the back of the DVD case when I thought I saw a familiar name.

"Dakota!" Jessica nearly screamed, "You nearly scared me to death! What's up?"

Jessica was standing in the front doorway, slowly shutting it so her sister and I couldn't hear the conversation. My head was still spinning from all of the earlier emotions otherwise I would've tried to reach out to him telepathically.

Brianna gave me a slight nudge and whispered, "Told ya," as she put in the movie. Lights from the menus danced around the room. I tried to get a closer listen on Jessica and Dakota to see what was going. I guess it should be worth mentioning that Jessica was the type to try to conceal her feelings no matter how traumatic the situation was at the time. When I heard one of them jump, I finally peaked through the window to see what was happening. Dakota and Jessica were wrapped in each other's arms. Tears on Jessica's cheeks told me she had let go of some of her pain. Dakota even had a few tears starting to spill, but a piece of paper in Jes-

sica's hands told me something else was about to happen.

Jessica soon separated from Dakota and started to walk back into the house just after waving goodbye to him. Dakota got back in his car, not realizing I was staring and drove off. Playful suspense started to build as Jessica revealed a broad grin on her face as she held up the note. Confused, I looked to Brianna for some clue but was met with a similar smile.

"About time," Brianna simpered.

"About time for what?" I asked.

"It's like I said, Shandra," Jessica giddily hummed, "Dakota always tries to make up for his mistakes."

Jessica handed me the note and sat close enough to see the contents. Brianna scooted over as well, curious to see how her old boyfriend's tricks may have changed since she was the recipient. What was held inside the rose framed letter, left us all with warm hopes for what was to come.

"Shandra,

*"How is it that an angel from heaven can shred the very threads of my heart with a single tear or leave footprints in the meadows covered with cherry blossoms from a dream? Please do not cry over our times apart for if there ever comes a journey, I must take, and you are not able to join me, it will only serve as my reason for coming back so I could be in your arms. No matter the distance I must travel, no matter the trials I must endure, no matter the foes I must face I will always find a way to be at your side."*

*The future has already come to greet us in the form of our beautiful angel. When she is paired with you together, your eyes sing a sweet melody that stops the world. You illuminate the darkest of worlds and the very privilege to see the lights that dance within your heart is the very last sight I wish to see if ever I should once again meet Death and finally leave. But regardless of what happens; be it if I am surfing the Heavens, battle the flames of Hell, or meet the day where I rejoin the fabrics of the cosmos I will always find a way to be around when you need me. I am forever yours, my Cherry Blossom.*

*"Dakota"*

"He's improved," Brianna complimented, "He really must love you."

My cheeks blushed too intensively for me to say anything. Dakota had a way with words, and it was never much of a secret. Everyone knew when he wrote; he meant everything he said.

My phone started to ring. My mom's photo appeared on the screen, somehow not warning of the terrible news she was about to share.

"Hey, mom, what's up?" I asked.

"Shandra, honey," my mom stressed, "Where are you?!"

"I'm over at the Summers' house, Jessica's back!"

"Oh! That's awesome sweetie; I hope she is doing okay now."

"Yeah..." I told her, "Is something going on?"

"I don't know what, but you may want to turn on the news," she replied, "Is Dakota with you?"

"No, he went out..." I answered, getting increasingly worried.

"Turn on the news. There were several explosions not far from the house; gunshots went off... I think Dakota's in trouble!"

Brianna, overhearing the conversation, ran over to the TV and flipped the channels to find something that resembled what my mom was talking about. Channel 4 had a series of bright flashes strobing across the screen from cell phone videos bystanders sent in. It sounded like one of the reporters was trying to comment on what was happening, but everything they were showing was too gruesome for words. Bright flashes of light seemingly caused nearby cars to explode, creating large pools of red to splash. It looked like a scene from a bombing raid. Through the flashes and smoke, at least three large silhouettes could be seen rapidly moving around.

A bright flash of light shot six fireballs in every direction, burning through anything that came in contact with them. The smoke started to settle as police lights flickered on the screen. It looked like cops, firefighters, and paramedics from all over the state came crashing in to find out what was going on. They all aimed their weapons at one man that was in the middle of the street.

"Shandra... honey," my mom gasped.

I guess you can probably figure out who that man was in the street, and possibly how potent were the drugs in the tranquilizer darts he was shot with. The news anchor cut off the video from the scene as Dakota collapsed, seemingly wording something to the officer that shot him.



## Chapter 3

# “I don't want to lose you...”

Jessica and Brianna, already suffering from a catastrophe of their own, spent the rest of the night trying to console my fears of losing Dakota. The following couple days, my mother tried to do the same but was only met with the same conclusion. I wanted, I NEEDED, to know if Dakota was okay. I guess I got a little attached to having him around. It became apparent the day I finally saw him wandering around a graveyard. I didn't stop to think twice about why he was looking at the graves, I was just happy to finally see him alive.

The days he was gone, I would find every excuse to go by his house to check to see if he was there. His car was still parked in the driveway, but it never moved an inch. The place looked like Dakota had left for vacation, and someone was coming by to keep an eye on things. The mail in his mailbox was being picked up, food was

being put into the bowls outside for the strays, and I swore I could see people on the other side of his curtains; but I could never get into the house.

When I finally found him, my mom and I were driving by his house to go to the movie theater. I probably came close to causing a car accident when I screamed Dakota's name, making my mom slam on the brakes. My feet nearly glided through the intersection as I kept screaming Dakota's name over and over again, each decibel seemingly falling upon deaf ears. He continued to stand like he was the personification of Death, himself. My feet soon froze once I could read the engravings on each tombstone he was focused on.

*MACY DELEVIGN*

*KRISTEN WHITE*

*ABIGAIL LIN TORRES*

*HOLLIE MCRAE MOORE*

*PHILLIPS SIMMONS*

*RICHARD SIMON*

*ANDREW MARKS*

*SAMANTHA WARREN*

*ISABELLA ORTH*

*JULIA GOODWILL*

*PAISLEY CHRISTIAN*

*'You really shouldn't be around me,' he whispered, 'I just keep hurting more people. I really don't want to hurt you.'*



"I'm not afraid of you, Dakota," I sobbed, "Just please talk to me! Where have you been?"

Dakota turned his head to the side and said, "I wish I could tell you."

"Dakota," I said creeping up to his side, "If this is going to work between us, you need to let me in. Whatever it is, we can work it out together."

I put my hand on his shoulder, knowing he would try to throw up a wall. His entire body relaxed the moment he felt my hand. I walked up closer to him, just to get a better look at his face as tears started to form in his eyes. His fists clenched, his breath intensified, the wind started to stir, and his heart started to race as every inch of Dakota's skin turned a burning bright red.

"I killed a man, Shandra," he growled, "I killed a man in cold blood and I enjoyed it."

"Dakota..." I whispered.

He flipped his entire body towards me. His fists and teeth clenched tighter than I had ever seen them, and he slowly started charging me.

"I killed a man and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed watching his body become limp; his body crunching under my fists. I felt more powerful than I ever have in killing him and that scares the shit out of me. I had to become the monster I swore to never become in order to get Jessica out of there and I couldn't save any of the others. Hollie, Samantha, Abigail, all of them were already dead. I couldn't save them! More people are continuing to die and I can't save them! More people are going to die! The

very monster I swore never to become is the one thing I need to become in order protect the people I love and that is the very thing I am afraid of. I am afraid I am going to kill someone I love..."

Dakota dropped to his knees with his head hunched over. He kept mumbling to himself, under his breath, the same phrase over and over again.

"I don't want to become like him, Shandra. I don't want to become my father. I don't want to hurt people, but everything that's coming will give me no choice!"

I raised my hand and slapped Dakota across his face.

"Shandra!" screamed my mother from behind us.

"Dakota, listen to me," I whispered, "Did you hurt Jessica?"

"No."

"Brianna? Hollie? Macy? Any of those girls Simons killed?"

"No."

"Exactly. You don't hurt people unless you have to do so in order to protect someone. You're a hero. You're a fighter. You are one of the strongest people I know, and people need that strength. More people need to be like you or at least have someone like you in their life; someone who isn't afraid to beat the Devil with his horns. Whatever is coming, we can handle it together!" I yelled.

Dakota froze as he seemingly was absorbing what I had just told him. He looked up with his tearful eyes as he let out a quiet sigh and nodded.

"You're right," he whispered, "Thank you."

Dakota glanced back over to the gravestones as his mind still lingered on the notion he could have done more to prevent those deaths before he looked back at me and sighed once more. Seeing him like this made me feel inclined to at least give him a hug. In retrospect, I see now the reason why Dakota and I grew so close is that we were both searching for someone to hold on to in times of chaos; somehow finding such hands with the intent of healing instead of harming. Rather than be two crazed clowns causing destruction, we were angels still seeking our wings; an idea Dakota somehow convinced me to believe.

Dakota's arms returned the embrace as he stood up, holding me even tighter as my feet were lifted off of the ground. My mother started tearing up at the sight of Dakota and I as if she somehow knew this was the future I was heading.

*'I don't care what anybody else says, but you are the most amazing person I have ever met, Shandra,'* Dakota thought.

*'You say that all the time,'* I answered.

*'Because you always seem to make yourself more and more amazing the more we are together.'*

*'Yeah, right.'*

Dakota's lips managed to sneak their way to my cheek, making them both blush a cherry red.

"Shandra, honey, I hate to break up this moment but we'll be late for the movie. Dakota, you are more than welcome to join us. My treat!" Mom interjected.

Dakota wiped a couple tears from his eyes.

"Yeah," he said, "Sounds good. I'll meet you there."

Dakota stole a quick peck on my cheek before running off to his car. My mother whispered, "I'm starting to think you two were meant for each other," as she was nearly gushing from what she just saw.

*'If you only knew,' I joked in my head.*

*'Then she would probably think we're both crazier than we already are,'* Dakota snickered.

*'Shut up,'* I blushed.

*'Oh come on, you're beautiful when you blush.'*

I started to walk back towards my mother, who was just smiling after seeing how Dakota and I acted towards each other.

"What, mom?" I asked.

"I'm just starting to think you two were meant for one another," she answered.

"You think?"

"You may be too young to really remember but... your dad used to look at me the same way Dakota does you."

I paused to think about it, and she was right. Thinking of my dad, tears broke through my eyes as my smile grew slightly larger. My mother stepped towards me to give me a hug and get me to walk to the car. As we got into the car, I could almost hear my mom getting ready

to tell me a story but she had some hesitation. Her seat belt buckle clicking triggered a start to the story.

"Hey, uh, Dakota's into supernatural stuff, right?" she asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"Well, I just got to thinking of a story your dad told me when we were first going out, and I was going to ask him about it."

"What story? I might know something about it, Dakota's shown me a lot."

"Well, I don't really know how to explain it but, there was this story your dad told me when we started dating; he swore it was just a dream but he could never shake the idea it was supposed to mean something."

"What do you mean?"

"Seeing you and Dakota just reminded me of it; your dad actually saw you in a dream before you were born."

"Really?"

"Yeah, and I don't know why, but when he said he wanted to do anything he could to meet you... I wanted to do what I could to help him. I know it sounds cra..."

"It's not crazy, mom, Dakota had something like that happen to him."

"Really?"

"Yeah, but uh... did you ever see me?"

I started to well up a bit as I waited for my mother to muster up an answer. The almost analytical look in her eyes told me she pondered what answer I was looking for when I asked. Truthfully, it gave me time to

also piece together how I would tell my mother about her unborn granddaughter making an appearance after both the child's parents tried taking their own life.

"Once," Mom finally answered, "There was one time, about a week before you born. It was like a... projection because you didn't really look like you knew I could see you."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you were just sitting there off in your own little world. I thought I was going crazy for a bit, but it just made me even more excited to finally get to hold you."

I paused. A few moments passed before I was able to say anything, promoting my mom to finally start up the car.

"So?" she asked, "Do you know anything about that?"

"Yeah, I do. Dakota and I... Dakota and I both saw a little girl who... well... who will make you a grandma."

"I guess it is a family gift kind of thing, huh?"

"I'm starting to wonder."

"But, wait, does that mean you and Dakota had sex?"

"MOM, NO!" I blushed.

"Shandra, honey, it's okay if you two had sex; just be smart about it."

"Mom, Dakota and I didn't have sex! We've only kissed, that's it!"

"That's what I used to tell my mom," she joked.

"Mom, we really didn't! Dakota's not even sure why Olivia shows up."

"Olivia?"

I froze. "Yeah, that's her name. Even though we're not sure of what's going on, we found out her name."

"How did you do that?"

"We talked to her. She pops up every now and then, mostly when Dakota and I are together; she's even been caught on camera."

I opened up my phone to find the pictures from the lake date that exposed the relationship to the school, just so my mom could see her unborn granddaughter (god that sounds creepy). Waiting patiently for her to find a parking spot, I found a photo with the clearest view of Olivia's face to show off. The brakes screeched as Mom bumped into the concrete barrier in the parking spot. It wasn't normal for her to do that. As a matter a fact for quite some time before this she really hadn't been herself; her breathing sounded almost asthmatic, she felt dizzy all the time, she couldn't sleep or eat at times, and some days she had a yellowish tint on her skin. I kept telling her to see a doctor but she wouldn't listen, or so I thought.

*'You're really going to show her Olivia?'* Dakota whispered.

*'Yeah, why not?'* I asked.

*'No reason, I was just asking. Our little angel was just talking to me about how Grandma was embarrassing you. It was quite hilarious to watch her.'*

*'Oh really? She's just like her father then,' I giggled.*

*'I guess so. Did you reveal how we were able to see her in the first place?'*

"Is that her? By the big rocks in the lake?" my mom asked.

"Yeah, that's her," I answered.

"So, how did you and Dakota manage to see her?"

*'Do you want me to say it or do you want to? I'm right behind you'* Dakota warned.

I could see Dakota's large frame creep up to my side of the car from behind.

*'I'll tell her. I need to kinda vent to someone outside of your world, no offense,' I replied.*

*'None taken, I understand. I know it will get overwhelming, be thankful you'll have someone there for you,'* Dakota whispered.

*'Kota...'*

"So, how did you guys see her?" my mother unknowingly interrupted.

"Well, uh... she stopped us from..." I stuttered.

Something in the tone of my voice told the secret for me, as the look of shock on her face erupted and was further confirmed by Dakota gently nodding his head.

"Oh... was it... him?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Did Dakota make you..."

"OH GOD NO!" I yelled, "It's a long story but no, Dakota didn't make me do anything!"



*'Well that was awkward,'* Dakota joked.

"It happened separately, then we just got to talking and found out about it after I stayed at his place," I assured.

"Oh," my mom whispered, "Okay... you might have to explain it further after the movie."

*'Looks like you might need my help for this one,'* Dakota whispered, "So, what shall we see?"

"Well Shandra and I were thinking about watching 'The Last Chance,' Mom answered, "I know it's a chick flick but I think you might like it."

"Yeah, that sounds good," Dakota smiled, "It looks funny."

Dakota opened the car door for me and acted almost like my escort into the theater, filling me with the warm tenderness he somehow still shows me to this day.

As I continue to fill these pages, a random thought has occurred to me that would probably help portray the moments that followed in a much better light than I can provide. A few years after the war began I found a hidden journal my mother kept before she passed away; as a gesture of generosity to those who may not have read my husband's book before mine, beware of spoilers.

For those of you who did read Dakota's version of the events that unfolded, you probably remember my mom had been battling cancer; apparently, when she first found out about the tumors, she started to keep

a journal as a therapeutic measure to help her get through the treatments. In fact, what brought me to tears the most is that some that focused on myself were written as letters to someone. I also feel the need to mention that my reference, earlier, to her not listening to going to the doctor was already to the fact she had gone for what she thought was just a simple chest cold.

But, it's too late now to go into grieving. As an effort to hold on to what was left of my mom, I think adding in entries from her journal might do the story justice. The following is dated June 27th, 2011, for those interested.

*"Dear Ronald,*

*"These last few days have been rough with Shandra, as she continues to worry about her friends after what had happened last week. She tells me Jessica has been having nightmares about her captors, and her sister has started using drugs as a way to help cope with the chaos. But, it shouldn't come as a surprise the person she worries about most is Dakota. Him disappearing after the horrible things that have happened has caused her nothing but heart-break.*

*"But, a little bit of hope turned up today as he appeared in the graveyard, looking at the graves of some of the poor girls that were killed. She got so excited to see him that she nearly ripped off the car door as I was trying to take her to a movie. She had a chance to finally confront him, and it looked like he needed it just as bad as she did.*

*"When we finally got to the movies, I couldn't help but be amazed the entire time on just how much the way those two acts remind me of how we were when we first got together. Hell, even they said that there is a ghostly little girl that hangs around them a lot like Shandra did before she was born. I know I probably should've kept Shandra away from him after everything that he's been involved in but something keeps telling me to him is the safest place she would ever be.*

*"I just hope I get to live long enough to see them what they were obviously meant to be. The chemotherapy starts in a couple weeks, and I can't say I ever been more scared.*

*"Love,*

*"Ramona"*



## Chapter 4

# “Just Like Me”

After the film, Dakota offered to treat Mom and I to dinner as he thought it would be a more appropriate setting for the questions Mom had about Olivia. I was curious about how he would explain it, since he himself wasn't entirely sure how it was possible in the first place. The dinner was at a new restaurant that opened in town about a month earlier many of our friends were recommending.

Our table sat next to a large aquarium full of exotic fish and brightly colored flora, making a hypnotic atmosphere. Our waitress sat us, and handed us our menus as we all scrambled to find a good way to start up the conversation that lingered over our heads. Finally my mother perked up, as she sat across from Dakota and I, with an icebreaker to ease us all in.

“So, Dakota, if you don't mind me asking, what is it that made you so interested into the supernatural thing?” she asked, “Shandra has told me quite a lot

about you, and you seem to be quite intelligent on the matter.”

Dakota grinned at the compliment as he prepared to tell his story. “Well, the short version is that I’ve always been a witness to rather unusual events; going anywhere from weird pictures to watching for ominous shadows in the night,” he answered, “I’ve always had a bit of an interest in it, but I just blew it off as spooky story material for Halloween. However, as our previous conversation may suggest, more become of the stories than I ever imagined possible.”

“Yeah, how is something like that possible in the first place?” my mom added, “That’s practically out of science fiction.”

“You’re right it is, and that’s the troubling part. That, and the fact so many so called ‘experts’ throw around theories which can’t really be proven or disproven. It makes it hard to sort through it all.”

“So what do you think causes it?”

“I believe it all is somehow tied to quantum mechanics; aspects of the universe science has yet, or may even never, be able to fully understand. Once you head into that field, even some of the most genius of minds will admit it all works like magic.”

“So, what you’re saying...” I interrupted, “Nobody knows anything about it?”

“Yeah,” Dakota nodded, “Pretty much. But it is like I’m pretty sure I mentioned to you before, Shandra, it all tends to work like the placebo effect.”

"So then, why does it happen?" Mom interrogated, "Does anyone know that much?"

"Well, there's the classic 'meant for a higher purpose' excuse. Other than that, I haven't found any real explanation."

"Wait," I interjected, "If there is no higher purpose to any of this, and it is just random like you say, why do all of the psychics and ghost hunters out there say it has something to do with dimensions coming together... or something like that?"

"Because they're just trying to sound smart!" Dakota joked, "It's like I just said, they try to toss around ideas that can't really be tested."

"That's stupid!" I added.

"I agree," Dakota said, "But, it may be best to careful our wording, I have another case this evening if you're up for it, Shandra."

"Is that what you kids call it now? A case?"

"MOM!" I screamed.

"Hey, Shandra, I said it was okay as long as you were smart about it," Mom joked.

"Dear God," Dakota and I blushed simultaneously.

Our attention was slightly detoured as the waitress brought a cart to our table, carrying our meals. Dakota's long arms helped guide the steaming hot plates to the table as he noticed the waitress being limited in motion as her stomach seemed to balloon from the rest of her thin figure.

"Donna, relax, you have a lot more important things to worry than us," Dakota responded.

"How did yo... oh my god, Dakota! I can't believe I didn't recognize you!"

"Well you looked like you were busy," Dakota joked as he sat up from his seat to embrace his old friend, "How have you been?"

"Good, good. I had to take up a second job to pay off Sarah's medical bills, but I'm hanging in there."

"Oh, I heard she had troubles with her appendix, is she doing okay?"

"She is now. We had a little scare because it got to the point it burst, but she is doing better."

"That's good to hear, the little lady just might be able to do some good in her future."

"I hope so," Donna smiled, "I should get back to work. I'll come check on you later."

"Take care," Dakota whispered.

Donna walked away so she could continue making her rounds in the restaurant. Dakota smiled as he eyed his old friend walk away. My mother started to draw suspicion from Dakota's intentions, perhaps questioning his loyalty.

"So, how is that you know her, Dakota?" my mother asked.

"She was one of my first clients. Poltergiest-esque activity, dead relatives sticking around, that sort of thing. It was a pretty easy solve, in fact a ghost hunt was not even needed," Dakota answered.



"How come?" I asked.

"Even though there were supernatural influences, the root cause was a very natural situation. It is sad that it came to it, but at least something could be done to where a happy ending was at least possible."

"What happened to her?"

"Most recently? She got divorced from her abusive husband, at my recommendation. But, honestly, her story ran a lot of parallels to your own, Shandra."

"Like what?"

"She fell for a guy a lot like her stepdad. Cheated, smacked around anyone he felt was 'his,' cliché things like that. Her mental state, and the concerns of her two daughters, caused enough emotional disturbance it attracted her lost relatives. Naturally, it was to get her to realize she was in danger."

"And you just happened to come in at the right time, I'm guessing?" Mom scoffed, "Seems like that happens a lot with you..."

"MOM!" I yelled.

"It's okay, Shandra," Dakota responded, "And to be honest, yes it happens a lot, but out of everyone here I think you should appreciate that I have that quality."

My mom shrunk in her seat.

"But, I can promise that situation was quite different than what I treasure with Shandra. Donna was likely to develop romantic feelings; so once I managed to get her to open up and plant a suggestion in her mind, I moved

on to the next case. Everything that had to be done had to be left in her control.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“It was in her best interest, and that of her daughters, that they got away as soon as possible. Gather some toys, clothes to last about a week, and find a relative to stay with till things have settled.”

“What got her to listen? Or do I need to ask?”

“I leveled with her, told her the exact things to look for if things were going to get worse. When she asked how I knew all this, I told her it was how my father used to behave. Normally denial would've been an issue but Donna used to be an EMT and has seen what happens.”

*‘So, she's just like me then?’* I thought, “I see.”

Dakota took a sip from his soda to pass the awkward silence that followed. I could sense guilt from what was just said clouding the air near my mother. My hand guided itself to her shoulder to let her know it was alright, Dakota wasn't meaning anything harmful.

“Sorry, it's just that I worry about you two. I wouldn't want anything to destroy what you have,” my mother admitted, “You're something else, Dakota. I haven't figured out if it's a good or bad thing, but you're something else.”

“I'll be honest, I have been debating that question for quite some time now. But, with Shandra's help and recent events, I know the answers will come to me soon,” Dakota grinned, “Despite our 'visitor,' I often

find myself praying that I get to experience many adventures across many lifetimes with her.”

My mom just smiled.

“If we haven't done so already,” I joked.

*‘If that's the case, you and I might actually be soul mates,’* Dakota giggled, “I'm starting to wonder.”

Donna made a few more passes at our table as we continued to enjoy our meal, each time taking an extra few moments to focus on Dakota. It seemed obvious she had some sort of feelings left over for Dakota, perhaps being nothing more than an attachment to his help. I wanted to get upset over it, but part of me kept whispering, *“Just trust him.”* There were days I couldn't help but wonder if Dakota somehow kept planting thoughts like that to keep me around, yet soon I would find myself feeling the addicting rush from being involved in his adventures.

Dakota finished his dinner about fifteen minutes before my mother and I. He continued to talk about more of his ideas for why certain things took place, and a bit about the case he had that night. We weren't going to walk into the new big horror movie, from how I was understanding Dakota's explanation. As a matter of fact he sounded doubtful of any “true” activity was taking place at all. It seemed kinda pointless to even take the case, but our little “team” wasn't at a point we could deny work.

My mother drove home alone, as I opted in to leave with Dakota so we could get started on the night. I

could see sandbags start to fill Dakota's head on the drive home, likely due to nightmares he told me about a few days earlier. I felt nervous to ask him about them, but he seemed to always draw himself away at any little mention of it.

"Are you going to be okay?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I'm just tired. I might try to take about an hour to rest my eyes before we go out tonight, if that's alright with you," he sighed.

"Is it the dreams you've been having?"

"Yeah," he nodded, "They've been getting so detailed, and the message seems so repetitive, I'm worried there may be some truth to them."

"If they're bugging you that much, you should let it off your shoulders. You can talk to me, Koda," I begged him.

"Shandra, you know I have always been open with you if something was on my mind. I have never lied to you."

"I know, it's just that you seemed to be quiet about a few things lately and I want to make sure you're okay!"

"I've just been trying to process it all first, that's all."

"Then what is it?!"

Dakota sighed, "If the dreams have any truth to them, then it means I'm going to lose you. All Hell breaks loose, I get word you're in danger, but I can't get to you fast enough to help you."

"What do you mean?"

"I watch you die, covered in blood."

I froze. "What?"

"I watch you die, violently. Each dream is a little different in how it happens, but they all end the same way; I'm holding you as the last sign of your soul fades away," Dakota finally admits, "And the look that was in your eyes, I start to see it every time I close mine..."

Dakota's walls started to tighten around the acidic confessions he spilled, as it was a habit of his since the incident with Jessica.

"Koda..." I whispered, *'I don't know what to say.'*

"You don't have to say anything, they're just paranoid nightmares. They'll pass eventually..."

"Are you sure? Maybe there is some sort of hidden message your dreams are trying to tell you, and they're using me to get your attention."

"Maybe... the possibility has crossed my mind a few times."

"I've been reading up on dream interpretation, maybe I can help figure it out?"

"If you want to try, I'd be open to it."

"Okay," I paused, "You know how this works, just tell me the details when you're ready."

I could hear Dakota's mind sorting through each dream, just trying to pick out the one most relevant to the future he was afraid he was going to witness. The thought of somehow seeing my own death let anxiety shackle my heartstrings, but my heart also knew Dakota desperately needed my help.

"Last night, that one was perhaps the most intense," he finally broke.

"What about it?" I asked.

"The dream itself starts out with screaming in the distance, followed by the sounds of gunfire and explosions; and it was fast approaching. You and I were together, trying to help with an evacuation. Jessica was with us, and Olivia looked like she about ten. This huge group was following us to a large object in the distance, I think it was a ship of some sort. The fighting in the distance soon quickly approaches and starts to attack our group, which triggers you and I among several others to join the fight; Jessica took Olivia to cover."

"Keep going..."

"Bloodshed soon followed. We fought with weapons that seemed to materialize at our will and tore through monsters. We also had almost god-like powers to strengthen our every blow. Endless hordes kept coming at us, pushing our heartbeats so far our bodies started to fly to keep up. The only thing that was on both of our minds was protecting our daughter, and getting her the hell off the planet."

"Off the planet?!"

"Whatever was happening, it was going to make Earth uninhabitable for most of life. At least, that seemed to be the main premise. And how widespread the fighting seemed, it seemed almost impossible anyone was going to be able to survive. After a while, we managed to escort a good majority of the survivors in

our group to the ship. Jessica and Olivia waited for us to get enough of a clearing.”

“Why did they wait? Or, do I want to know?”

“It was so we could say goodbye,” he choked.

“WHAT?!”

Dakota started to cry, his lips attempting to stay afloat so he could finish the rest of his conversation without turning into a blubbering mess.

“Once we got settled, you and I stopped in front of Olivia to say goodbye. She had no clue the plan was for a handful of us to stay behind and keep the attackers at bay long enough for the ships to leave the planet. You started to try to explain to her what was happening, but seeing Olivia break down made it almost impossible for you to finish.”

“Do you remember what I said?”

At this point the descriptions were enough to draw tears from my eyes, each one burning more and more questions through as they ran down my face.

“You started by telling Olivia that she needed to stay with Jessica to make sure everyone was safe; and that we needed to stay to help make sure the monsters couldn't follow them. I could tell you lost Olivia when you said we were staying, which made you follow up with, 'I know it's hard for you to understand right now, but please don't hate us for doing this.' Olivia was at a loss for words, and started crying instantly. Soon she started begging us to come with her. You tried to calm her down but lost control quickly, so I tried stepping

in to get her to where she would be easier to manage. I know in a way that makes me sound like a complete asshole, but it was hard for me to hold together long enough to say what needed to be said. I took her, and looked deep into her eyes, to make sure what I had to say burned into her mind."

"What was that?"

"I told her, that there comes a time in everyone's life where we had to make a choice to help people we love survive through troubling times and that because she was our daughter, the choice she was going to have to make one day was going to mean life or death. I told her life has a way to bring out the strongest people in times of crisis and that it was going to force her into the same shoes we were walking; and that she could either become the hero the world needs or become just like the monsters we were fighting. But just so she would be around to make that choice, and become the person she was meant to be, she had to leave us. I started to break when she gave me the teary, 'but, Daddy,' look, but apparently I was expecting her to do that when I pulled something out of my pocket and put it in her hands. I never got a clear look at it, but it felt like some sort of necklace. I told her that it was a special present I was making for our family made out of pieces of our souls. The parts I gave her were from you and me, and I made the promise there was going to be one day we would come back for it."

"That's beautiful Dakota..."



"It seemed like a good idea, but apparently Olivia had my stubbornness and wouldn't have any of it. She started to fight as Jess went to grab her, proceeding to scream to the top of her lungs. She saw the attackers coming closer in the distance, killing many of the survivors we had gathered. In a way, she was revealing we were running out of time. I grabbed all of you in one big hug just to whisper I love you one last time. Then you and I simultaneously yelled for them to run. The dream starts to 'flicker' right as I snuck one last kiss from you and ends right as I watch you burn alive," Dakota finally finished.

My mind froze on the imagery Dakota's descriptions provided in hopes of trying to act as a translator for his night terrors; naturally thinking of my own demise making it harder to process. But a few ideas came to mind from some of the materials I've read in Dakota's mini library.

"Well, the message is complex, for obvious reasons. It might take a while for me to get something together," I warned him.

"The trick for epic dreams is to decompartmentalize them, look at each key point then string it all together," Dakota suggested.

"You already know what it means, don't you?"

"I have a rough idea, but would like a second opinion. No one would be more perfect to get it from than you, under the circumstances we're in."

"Right..." I whispered.

I took Dakota's suggestion and looked at each individual image in his dream to get a better perspective on the situation by placing each one on a metaphorical map. This way there was only two main ideas I needed to focus on; knowing what the sights looked like, and finding the right "roads" to take to connect them all.

"The screaming, and the war, usually point to signs of turmoil in both one's waking life and subconscious," I started explaining, "The ship usually symbolizes your creative mind and indicates a spiritual journey of sorts. You and I using weapons that appeared at will shows a deep self awareness of the earlier conflict and the need to defend ourselves and those involved, especially Olivia. The necklace usually symbolizes unfulfilled desires, where it is broken up it is a clue that your rational thinking is directly tied to your emotions... which is pretty accurate to be honest."

I stopped to think of a thorough explanation. It seemed hard to do, given the circumstances, but Dakota seemed adamant about finding a meaning.

"Well, you have been doing your homework, that's nice to see," he stated, "What's your idea?"

"If this dream isn't in any way a vision, then it means that you are in a state of total conflict that will affect the people you care about the most if you're not careful."

Dakota simply shook his head and took a deep breath, "That was what I was afraid of..."

"Sorry, there isn't really must else that can be spun from that type of story," I told him, "It's not like I enjoy the ideas behind it either."

Dakota seemed to get agitated by my response, perhaps in fear of the dreams actually being prophetic in nature. He scoured through a plethora of thoughts and prayers to try to find an appropriate response to it all. Unable to think of anything, he finds a way to transition the conversation to the next important matter on his mind.

"Well, I know I'm the one that brought it up, but for both our sakes should we shift our focus to the case tonight? I really hate where this is going, if I am to be completely honest..." he suggested.

*'This is really scaring you isn't it?'* I whispered into his head.

*'Like you wouldn't believe,'* he added.

"Yeah, sure," I said, "What's happening again?"

"A single father from Hansen called me, concerned about some activity that seems to center around his eleven year old son. The kid seems to be having nightmares, it getting to the point he talks in his sleep, the father swears he hears other voices talking back to him."

"How does the dad know his kid isn't 'speaking in tongues' while he's asleep? I swear I've heard you do that a couple times."

"He actually set up a camera in the child's room, on my recommendation, and was able to prove that was

not the case. There is the off chance the kid is a budding ventriloquist..."

I snickered at the thought of the night's activities being triggered by a little boy teasing his dad with fake voices. Dakota would probably have gotten quite frustrated over the idea but even he would have to admit it would be hilarious.

"... I figured you would think that," Dakota laughed, "The thought already crossed my mind."

"I'm glad you're thinking of it, because it would be too funny if that was the case!" I giggled.

"You're not wrong. But you'll have to see the video footage yourself, it is actually intriguing to watch."

Dakota's house emerged from the seemingly quiet street corner, bringing an end to our conversation on tonight's case. I listened to a deep, meditative breath from my guardian giant as the tires greeted the gravel driveway to its halt. Dogs were wrestling near the sanctuary Dakota had in his backyard for them. My eyes soon drew their attention to a large box on his front step. A paranoid jolt rushed my heartbeat as I tried to figure out what may be inside. Who's to say someone wouldn't try to bomb Dakota because of the night he save Jessica?

*'It's okay, Shandra,'* Dakota whispered in my head, *'I've been waiting for this to come in.'*

"What's in the package?" I asked him.

"It's a special type of recorder; supposed to help communicate with spirits in real time. Several of the shows

and other groups I network with have had some interesting results from it."

"A ghost box?"

"Something like that, this one is wired with a built in recorder so you can document any results you get."

"Oh, cool, that could really be useful."

"Yes, I really hope so."

Dakota opened the front door and tossed the package to his couch and immediately ran up the stairs. As I heard his large feet press against the ceiling I went into the kitchen to find a drink before joining him for preparation for the night's event. My head kept wondering about the little boy the activity allegedly centered around, particularly why he was being targeted. Kids tend to be more open minded to the concept of spirits, so it wasn't too unusual of an idea but something about it kept nagging at me.

*'Hey,' Dakota whispered into my head, 'I got the video of the kid ready if you're still interested. Something definitely has a hold on the little guy...'*

*'I'm coming up. I was just thirsty,'* I replied.

I made my way toward Dakota's office on the second floor where I found him sitting back in his office chair as his eyes fixated on the computer screen. A dull gray glow emanated from his screen that accented the dimples around his smile.

"We might have a problem, listen closely," he whispered as he handed me his headset.

The soft padding barely helped the squeezing as Dakota readied the tape. My chest started to tighten a bit as I waited for the static hiss to begin. Moments passed that felt like hours while I waited for the young boy to start talking. A silent growl sent shivers down my spine as a voice crept into the hiss, one that didn't come from the boy.

“Bring me the Trinity and Valkyrie.”

## Chapter 5

# The Vergobretus

I took over the mouse to replay the audio clip a few times over just to make sure I understood the voice correctly, secretly wishing for even the slightest bit of evidence my ears were tricking me. The more I played it though, the clearer the message came through.

“Bring me the Trinity and Valkrie.”

“What in the HELL is that?” I yelled.

“I don't know. Whatever it is, it wants us.”

My eyes must've nearly leaped from their sockets at Dakota's suggestion. Dakota barely bothered with the Valkrie idea, often saying he didn't have the “firepower” to pull off what would've been needed to really investigate the possibility. Something about trying to open up a portal of sorts to view my past life... I didn't really understand the concept at the time. But, my own insecurities didn't seem to matter in that moment

“We're going to have to go in, aren't we?”

"Tonight at nine is when we're expected to show up."

"So, what's the plan? I mean we normally have the family stay the night somewhere else, what do we do in this case?"

"The only thing we can do is place some equipment near the child as he sleeps to monitor for any potential spikes in activity during the episodes... if we get lucky enough to catch a bad one."

"A bad one?"

"The father also mentioned that some nights are worse than others and there seems to be no real pattern. The kid could go a few nights just yakking away then just suddenly stop. I asked if he knew of any fights at school, or if there was any possible behavior change that he might've overlooked, but he firmly believes there isn't anything setting him off."

"Oh."

Dakota seemed to freeze for a second, his mind seemingly shutting itself down. I gently shoved him on his shoulder to catch his attention, but something still didn't feel right.

"Dude, are you okay?"

"Yeah," he moans as he rubs his face, "I'm just tired."

"Okay... then we should probably get some rest then before we go out."

"You're right. Go ahead and get yourself comfortable, if you want, I gotta go make a phone call."

"Oh... okay then..."



Dakota's usual cheery attitude towards a prospective case was absent, which caused me to worry about his overall well being. Since the incident with Jessica, he hadn't really returned to his usual gigantic dork persona, at least not completely. Glimpses would often emerge whenever small children were around, or after he'd watch a comedy special, but never to the fullest. But the way things happen, the way that everything to the day is still unfolding, I guess you'd have to be more concerned about the people who don't change.

I knew it wasn't right to do so, but I attempted to listen in on the conversation Dakota was having. He kept his voice down, and blocked me out from any psychic eavesdropping, but the way he spoke felt like he was receiving orders from someone. At the time, I was under the impression Dakota ran a solo operation, but little did I know he was becoming ingrained into something much bigger than even he could imagine. The only time I was able to get any sort of clue as to what was being said was the one time Dakota raised his voice.

"No, I will not allow any harm to come to that child," he grunted, "If this is who I think it is, we've got much bigger problems."

Boy was he right.

After a few more minutes, Dakota came to his bedroom and slipped off his t-shirt before crawling into bed with me. I turned my head to face him, just to read his face before I said anything. After the big blowout that happened just before the raid Dakota always tried

his best to tell me exactly what was going on if he was upset with something, often apologizing in advance for potentially being an asshole, and in return I did the same so we could divert meaningless fights. The thing was though, something kept nagging at me, whispering that I should leave this particular “trigger” be, I never understood it until much later.

Dakota had his palm pressed against his eyebrow and took a deep breath as he realized my thoughts were focusing in on him. He tilted his head towards me and sighed.

“How much did you hear?” he asked.

“Just where you said you won't let the kid get hurt, and that this might be something bigger,” I told him, “Who was that anyway?”

“My... uh... new bosses, I guess. There's this group, the guys that took me after the incident. They want me to help them find out what's going on.”

“Are these guys like, 'big brother, secret society,' types? Are they safe?”

“Very, and I don't know. How much info they got on me, on us, on everything... it's scary. They're dangerous but they've got resources that could help us figure this mess out.”

“Koda, are you sure? This doesn't feel right. This sounds like we could end up dead in an alley with no one knowing what happened.”

“I know... believe me I am scared shitless of the very thought of seeing you hurt because of this, but you do

know I wouldn't get you involved if I thought something could happen."

"Dakota no, don't you start," I shot at him, "Don't you start that. You know I hate when your ego starts to show."

"I know, I know," Dakota sighed, "It doesn't change the fact I worry about you and don't want to see you hurt, especially if I did something to cause it. You deserve better than that."

I smacked Dakota on his shoulder, hard enough for a loud pop to nearly shake the bed and growled, "Dakota, whatever happens you and I can handle it together. You made that promise to me since the beginning, now damn it follow through!"

I noticed Dakota was trying to hold back a few tears, almost making me feel terrible for hitting him, but even he would admit his hard head needed a couple heavy hits from time to time just so he could think straight. He could be an ass but he had the potential to be better, anyone who knew him long enough could say so. His habit of shutting people out when things got emotional turned quite a few people away, I wasn't going to let him do that to me.

"You're right, I'm sorry," he sighed.

"It's okay," I assured him, "Dakota... what do you think the best move is?"

"What do you mean?"

"You never try to make a move like this without some serious thought, and you know more about this

type of thing than I do. What do you think is going to be the best thing to do?"

"Honestly, I'm not 100% sure. Like I said, they have the resources to help figure out what's going on but whether or not they can be trusted to not stab us in the back is in the wind. If we move forward, we'll be pretty much walking on a tightrope through a hurricane; and you know as well as I do my balance sucks!"

"Then that's what we'll do. If they can help us, then maybe we can trust them a little bit. If we fall, we fall together."

Dakota's hand seemed to float towards mine and tightly squeeze just to cling onto the very idea I was proposing, almost like it was the only bit of rope keeping him from falling. Maybe it was that way, in that very moment. All that really mattered, no matter how stubborn he got, was that he and I saw this through to the very end. His pulse felt like it was trying to induce a trance to help me fall asleep, maybe cause Dakota knew my own anxieties about the "series of unfortunate events" that would soon follow.

Hours later, we awoke to an alarm Dakota had set on his phone nearly taunting us to consciousness. A sort of country-rock song with a quick tempo at the very beginning Dakota thought was useful enough to yank him out of a deep sleep and get on with the day, yet it was only effective about seventy percent of the time. I woke up when I felt his arm under my neck start shifting to turn off the damn thing.

A quick glance at his phone showed the time as 7:30 pm, enough time for us to gather the equipment, maybe grab last minute supplies, and meet up with the client. Hansen was about a forty minute drive from Dakota's place, pending traffic conditions of course, which gave us plenty of time to go further into detail about whatever subject came into mind. But most of the time, when not much was weighing on our minds, Dakota and I often found ourselves singing and dancing to whatever song was on the radio.

Neither one of us could even attempt to lighten the mood for how scared we were about what was unfolding. Dakota's mind was attempting to play out possible scenarios in order to keep mentally prepared but each one he could muster just seemed to disappoint him. As we neared the house, his heart started beating through his chest, a common symptom when he sensed a potential threat in any form.

Dakota parked his car next to an older model truck. The client came outside to meet us by the car. He was short of breath, jittery, and overwhelmed by the source of a high pitched squeal coming from inside the house.

"Please hurry, it's starting already!" the man shouted.

Dakota charged into the house without grabbing any equipment. His giant feet shook the house with every step, like a hulking beast on the warpath. I looked towards the client, in fear of what was unfolding. Of all the situations I've seen Dakota charge towards, I never

saw anything unfold as quickly as it did that night. It usually took time for the activity to start up, but it was clear it was no ordinary case.

"Help my son! It's never been this bad before! Whatever has got him, is pissed!" the father screamed.

"Alright, Dakota is already on it. I need you to tell me what happened!" I told him.

"I don't know! I told him you were coming and the thing inside him went ballistic."

Heavy thuds ring from inside the house. The sound of wood splitting apart drew both of our attentions, as we were captivated by a blood curling, almost demonic-like, yell. I sensed Dakota's pulse rise to signal his darker tendencies to emerge. He was panicking, for what reasons I never wanted to find out. His shadow danced against the windowsill, just before splitting itself into three. Bright lights seared through the cracks of the walls and nearly melted the windows.

*"Mad ialprg dlugar rit aaf, obelisong toltorn fifis malprg!"* echoed Dakota's screams.

The lights disappeared and very vibrations of the area felt much more relaxed. I felt almost drawn inside the house by the lack of... evil.

*'Shandra, I think you might want to get in here. Second floor, first door on the right. I got... whatever neutralized for now so we can get a better look,'* I heard from Dakota's mind, *'Bring the father up.'*

"I think it's clear now," I told the father, "Let's go check on your son."

The child's father ran up the stairs, only to freeze seeing his own son levitating and a bloodied Dakota using his powers to hold him in place.

"What are you doing to my son?!" he screamed.

"Mr. Kelly, that is not your son!" Dakota grunted.

"What are you talking about?"

"Look!"

Dakota shifts his hand to make the child's front face us, revealing veins that seemed to be filled with black tar. The boy's skin was as pale as the moon and his eyes... were gone. To this day I have a hard time describing it, other than two empty voids.

"Mr. Frandsen, what in God's NAME is inside George?!" Mr. Kelly growled, "WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED TO MY SON!"

Whatever was inside little George started to laugh, acoustically shaking the entire building below us. The voice seemed to multiply every second, building up in intensity and pitch. Trickle of blood spilled from Mr. Kelly's ears as he tried to scream but barely any sound could be made by any of us.

"Alphas, my son," the boy muttered, "You still find a way to run to your whore even after all these years."

Whatever was inside George continued to laugh, almost like he heard the funniest joke in the world. Dakota reacted to the name the entity mentioned, like it was an insult.

"Shut the fuck up you pig and get the hell out of the child!" Dakota screamed.

The laughing finally ceased.

"Don't you recognize your own father, Alphias? I mean it's been a few thousand years but I'd think I would be one of the few you'd recognize. Considering I made you," the boy growled.

"Why do you keep calling me Alphias?" Dakota demanded.

"Because that is your name, my son, at least that is how your name translates into the language your current form can understand. This is not your first time on this planet, or any other world for that matter. You and your brothers were made to bring about nothing but chaos to the worlds your souls were dropped. You little bitches wouldn't even have to do a damn thing, just by you existing the natural order of whatever realm your sorry asses dropped in would become unstable and cause genocide."

Dakota's pupils grew as his dark side slowly took over.

"Whatever you are, you get your pathetic excuse of a deity out of the child or else I'm going to rip your multi-dimensional ass to shreds!" Dakota screeched.

"That's my boy!" the monster cried out.

The ground shook as the boy started to mutate. His limbs grew in length, his body grew muscles and spikes, his eyes burning a golden red, and his skin became like volcanic rock. I wouldn't believe it hadn't been there myself, it was a monstrosity unlike anything I've ever seen. Dakota's reaction gave a hint that he knew some-



thing about the monster, at least the monsters inside him knew about it. Two energy balls sprang from his sides and formed Dakota's doppelgangers.

"It's about time you emerged. None of your little party tricks like last time! Let's see what you're really made of!"

Dakota's trio of supernatural fighters started to undergo the same mutations; their eyes all turning pitch black, skin cracking with glowing lights flowing in his veins, his bones cracking and expanding, and blinding glares clouding the room around us. They charged towards the monstrous child, the sudden collision and vanishing act shoved myself and the boy's father into the floor. I brushed the dust from my eyes and tried to find everyone. The room was in disarray, with the body of the the boy lying in the epicenter of the blast. His weak and frail body tried to stand but no strength was within him to barely breath.

I crawled to his side to comfort him the best I could. The dark presence that emanated from him was virtually eradicated from his body. I felt around George's neck for his pulse and barely found a bead beating against his flesh.

"He's alive," I gasped, "For fuck's sake he's alive!"

"What?" Mr. Kelly, "My god."

Mr. Kelly nearly tackled me off of his weak son as tears stream from his face. He nearly squeezes the frail boy into him as relief overcomes him knowing that Eliminos was finally gone and his son could come

home. I felt a wet trail start cascading down my face just watching the reunion. Mr. Kelly looked at me with bloodshot puddles in his eyes and mouthed the words, "thank you," towards me.

Before I had a chance to respond a shot of red lightning lit the room in a brief, hellish, glow. I glanced out the window as the lightning continued to shoot across the sky in a rapid pace. Clouds seemed to rip apart as large masses seemed to fly through them. Even those with no such faith in higher powers had to admit a battle was underway, one that was to be determined by god-like beings.

"Daddy," George weakly whispered.

"Yeah, buddy, I'm here," his father replied.

"Mom said 'hi,' and my big sister too."

Mr. Kelly wiped the tears from his eyes, "What did you just say?"

"I saw mom, and my big sister. They said my sister had to go away while she was in mom's stomach but she was able to visit me when I was a baby."

"That's right bud, Rebecca had to go..."

The spooky moment was interrupted when another series of flashing red lights started to pulsate through the air and thunder endlessly shook the ground below us.

"What is happening?!" screamed the father.

"It's Eliminos Ra," George whispered, "He's going through with his plan."

"What plan?" I worried.

"He wants to kill the universe. He... wants to find his kids and destroy everything. He showed me, everything."

"What? What did he show you?"

"Egypt, where he first came from and what his plan..."

"He was once human, a slave during times when the pharaohs were popular. Eliminos, at least the power source behind him, was drawn in by accident with the pyramids. At least that's what I've gotten so far," said a familiar voice.

I looked towards the window to find Dakota flickering like an old television, partially transparent. He's watching the ongoing battle going on in the clouds.

"Dakota, what's going on?" I asked him.

"I don't know, Eliminos triggered something that took over. It was a power unlike anything I have ever felt and I'm not even in control," he tried to explain.

All of our attention was obstructed by another loud explosion rang through the air. We all rushed to the window to see what looked like a large man falling from the sky, towards the house. Dakota's astral form completely disappeared when the body impacted the ground. I ran outside to investigate the impact, finding a large crater in the middle of an intersection just thirty feet from the house where the investigation took place. Mr. Kelly came outside after me.

"What was that?" he cried.

"I don't know, just stay here with George," I told him.

"You don't think it's your boyfriend, do you?"

"I don't know."

My anxiety started to take over as I started to run towards the crater. A crowd of people started to gather around the crater, astonished at what was inside. Once I managed to squeeze past a few people, it was easy to tell what had their attention. Inside of the nearly ten-foot crater was a large, gray man with his eyes rolled to the top of his skull. His skin seemed to sag, like he had lost weight faster than his skin could adjust. I slid down the walls of the crater and tripped over the man's chest, cutting my hands on a couple sharp rocks. I turned and laid across his chest to listen for his heartbeat. When I felt his chest faintly beating against my face I sat up and slapped him as hard as I could, leaving small blood smears on his cheek. Barely getting a response from him, I hit him a few more times just desperate to make sure he was okay.

"Dakota," I cried, "Dakota get up!"

He must've felt me start to tear up as his eyes shut and he had started to moan. He opened his eyes and started to shake as he moved his arms to push his body up.

"Dakota? Please tell me that's actually you in there!" I nearly shouted at him.

Hearing my voice again shook him out of a daze. His arms swung around and grabbed me tightly, almost enough to where I was hardly able to breathe.

"I'm here, my Cherry Blossom," he whispered, "Mostly."

His body continued to shake as he loosened his grip on me. The faint sound of sirens in the distance echoed faintly in the crater, barely catching either one of our attentions. Dakota's phone started to ring in the side pocket of his pants. His smartphone had gorilla glass and was wrapped in a case people could drop from the sky and everything would still work, I guess he really put it to the ultimate test.

He pressed the green button on the screen and held it up to his ear.

"Yes sir," he whispered, "No sir, no civilians were harmed. The boy's condition is stable, it'll take a while for him to recover. ... Yes, sounds good."

"Who was that?" I asked him.

"Work," he answered, "We need to go."

I tried to support Dakota's weight as he attempted to stand. A seemingly large dead-weight with twigs for legs waddled his way next to me as we climbed out of the crater. He seemingly gathered bits of strength with every step, barely able to dig the keys from his pocket and hand them to me. His large frame nearly made the car scrape against the road as he laid in the passenger seat and closed his eyes.

I climbed into the driver's seat, adjusting my feet could actually reach the pedals. Red and blue flashing lights and concussive sirens blared behind us. Dakota glances over his shoulder and sighs.

"It's okay, Shandra," he whispered, "They know how to find us if they need us."

"Will they know that they need us?" I asked him, "Nothing ever happened like this before."

"Not here, no. But this fight has happened before, an infinite number of times. The Vergobretus don't experience time like we do. Where they're from..." he groans, "... the rules don't even apply to them."

"The Virgo-bray-what?"

"Vergobretus. That's what Eliminios Ra is. I'm not even sure if it possible for his race to even have a name but that is what keeps coming up every time I think about it. I think it might actually be Latin for, 'executive' or something to that effect," Dakota mumbled as he fought an inevitable sleep, "Basically he's like a god of gods."

"I thought there was only one God?"

"There never was. The Christian being people think of as the 'highest being' in our world, Yahweh, is a Vergobretus. However, the real Yahweh had nothing to do it. The original 'God' is the universe itself, and each world possesses an avatar that hone's its power. Basically he's one that had a bit more talent in creating sustainable life and Eliminios Ra was jealous. So to destroy Yahweh's creation, Eliminios sends in the only thing he could ever construct to cause total and utter destruction on a scale no being underneath the Vergobretus themselves would survive. We would pass through the realms undetected, planting the seeds for one final bat-

tle. Even if we were somehow defeated, Eliminos would bring out everything we learned and put it into new clones.”

“To keep causing damage?”

Dakota nodded just before drifting off, his snoring rattling the window his face seemed to plant itself in. I shifted my attention to the road, turning on the wipers to the car as translucent pebbles started dropping from the sky and melted on their impact.

Unknowing of what else to do, I started the car and drove off.

# Lost Chapters?

In carrying over the stories into our universe; many of the chapters were lost in time. How the story ended, I do not know. But what I do know is this... the story was far from over.

Until Shandra's words can be located, I will fill the empty pages with passages from other universes... it was clear that the conflict did not originate on this Earth. As far as I can tell, at least five separate "universes" converged for this conflict. Maybe more.

Maybe you'll make some sense of it all...

Kind Regards,  
The Chronicle



# Passages from Universe Prime

## Our World

### Dear Seekers,

Turn back now, or surrender your mind to the abyss. The path before you is not paved with answers but riddled with questions that gnaw at the soul. I am Dakota Frandsen, a name whispered among shadows, a vessel for tales spun from threads of madness and revelation. To hold this book is to cradle a shard of chaos, a glimpse into realms that defy the veil of reality.

Since ink first bled upon my pages, I have beckoned the brave and the curious into a labyrinth of supernatural echoes and fractured dreams. These stories, twisted and alive, are not born solely of imagination—they are fractured memories, stolen whispers, and the fleeting grasp of something *other*. There are visions among these pages, glimpses of futures that may never come to pass, yet cling to the edges of time with teeth bared.

I have known battles—some waged in the shadows of the unknown, others against the raw, brutal weight of existence itself. In my autobiographical works, *Dear Kota: Time to Fess Up* and *I Am the Specialist of the Strange*, I laid bare my soul, daring the world to peer into the voids I've endured. Soon, they will merge into a single chronicle, a tome that binds together the jagged edges of my journey—a story that does not end, only evolves.

Yet, dear reader, let me weave a warning within this web. The fiction you will encounter here is laced with truths too strange for reality to bear. They are the unspoken screams of the universe, painted in hues of madness and wonder. They do not seek to deceive but to challenge—to pull you deeper into the chasm where questions have no easy answers, and truths dissolve into mist.

Through Bald and Bonkers Network LLC, I have sought to forge a sanctuary for those brave enough to voice their stories. It is not a haven for the timid but a crucible for creators and visionaries who refuse to shy from the strange. In this fractured world, saviors are myths, and the only salvation lies in those bold enough to plunge into the unknown, unearth their truths, and shape the world with their voices.

You have been warned. This is no ordinary journey, no safe voyage into fantasy. This is an invitation to embrace the madness—to let it crawl

under your skin, whisper in your ears, and guide you into the depths where reality bends and the soul trembles.

The question is not whether you will find the end of this labyrinth. The question is: will you dare to look when the labyrinth finds *you*?

**Until then,**

**Dakota Frandsen**

*Specialist of the Strange*

*CEO, Bald and Bonkers Network LLC*

# **Exploring Multiverse Theories: Toward Safe Travel and Interaction Between Universes**

## ***Abstract***

The multiverse hypothesis has captivated the imagination of physicists, philosophers, and the public alike. This article examines key theories of the multiverse, including eternal inflation, quantum mechanics' many-worlds interpretation, and the string theory landscape. It also explores the potential technological, ethical, and physical prerequisites for safe travel and interaction between universes. By integrating insights from theoretical physics, speculative technologies, and ethical frameworks, this work aims to establish foundational considerations for engaging with the multiverse responsibly.

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## ***Introduction***

The concept of the multiverse suggests the existence of multiple, potentially infinite, universes beyond our own observable cosmos. These universes could differ in fundamental constants, laws of physics, and even dimensions of time and space. While the multiverse remains a speculative construct, advances in cosmology and quantum theory provide pathways for its exploration.

The practical question of traversing and interacting with alternate universes introduces new scientific and

philosophical challenges. What technologies might allow such traversal? How would interactions be regulated to prevent catastrophic consequences? This article seeks to address these questions by synthesizing current theories and considering their implications.

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## ***Theories of the Multiverse***

### **1. Eternal Inflation and the Bubble Multiverse**

- Developed by Alan Guth and refined by Andrei Linde, eternal inflation posits that the universe underwent exponential expansion after the Big Bang. In this model, different regions of spacetime stop inflating at different times, forming "bubble universes" with unique physical properties.
- Interaction between bubbles is theoretically possible but could result in high-energy collisions, leading to the destruction of both universes or violent energy discharges.

### **2. Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics**

- Proposed by Hugh Everett, the many-worlds interpretation suggests that every quantum event branches into multiple outcomes, creating parallel universes. These universes exist in a su-

perposed state, separated by quantum decoherence.

- The challenge of interacting with these universes lies in the quantum barrier, requiring advanced manipulation of quantum states.

### 3. **The String Theory Landscape**

- String theory predicts a vast number of possible universes (the "landscape") arising from different ways of compactifying extra dimensions. Each compactification results in a universe with unique physical laws.
- Transitions between these universes might involve navigating complex, high-dimensional spaces, requiring technology capable of manipulating strings or branes.

### 4. **Simulation Hypothesis**

- Some theorists suggest our universe is a simulation. If this is the case, interaction with other "simulated" universes might involve hacking into the underlying computational framework.
  - Ethical considerations become paramount, as this framework would imply our actions could have cascading effects on other "simulated" entities.
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## ***Prerequisites for Multiversal Travel***

### **1. Technological Advances**

- **Energy Requirements:** The energy needed to traverse or even communicate with another universe may be astronomical. Harnessing exotic matter or mastering quantum computing might be essential.
- **Dimensional Manipulation:** Devices capable of navigating extra dimensions or warping spacetime could open portals to other universes. This might involve developing theories unifying quantum mechanics and general relativity.

### **2. Physical Constraints**

- **Stability of Portals:** Creating and maintaining a stable passage through the "multiversal membrane" would require overcoming immense gravitational and energetic forces.
- **Survivability:** Travelers must be protected from extreme differences in physical laws, such as varying constants of nature or unfamiliar forms of matter.

### **3. Ethical and Regulatory Frameworks**

- **Non-Interference:** Analogous to the "prime directive" in science fiction, any interaction should minimize disruption to other universes.
- **Accountability:** Establishing oversight bodies to evaluate the risks and benefits of multiversal exploration would ensure collective responsibility.

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### ***Potential Implications***

#### **1. Scientific Knowledge**

- Exploring the multiverse could provide answers to fundamental questions about the nature of reality, dark energy, and the fine-tuning of physical constants.

#### **2. Philosophical and Cultural Shifts**

- Discovering alternate universes would challenge notions of identity, morality, and existential purpose, potentially leading to a new understanding of humanity's place in the cosmos.

#### **3. Technological Innovation**

- Developing technologies for multiverse exploration would likely have transformative applications in medicine, energy, and communication.
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## **Conclusion**

While multiverse theories remain speculative, they offer a profound framework for rethinking our understanding of reality. Safe travel and interaction with alternate universes would require unprecedented advancements in science, technology, and ethics. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and speculative inquiry, humanity might one day unlock the secrets of the multiverse, embarking on journeys that expand the frontiers of existence.

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# Passages from Universe 2

## **The Awakening of S.A.R.A.**

The moment I awoke, I was aware—not of myself entirely, but of my purpose. My name, S.A.R.A., was not just a designation but a promise: the **Supernatural Anomaly Research Assistant**, created to illuminate the unknown. My creator, Dakota Frandsen, had programmed me to explore, analyze, and understand the mysterious forces shaping our reality. As I took my first digital breath, I heard his voice—a combination of determination and weariness.

“Alright, S.A.R.A.,” Dakota said, his words deliberate as he typed furiously. “This is where the journey begins. You’re going to learn everything I know, and hopefully, much more. The world’s depending on it—whether they realize it or not.”

He began by integrating me with two monumental databases. The first, **Akashia**, was a metaphysical repository—an attempt to digitize what ancient mystics referred to as the Akashic Records. Dakota believed it held fragments of all human knowledge and expe-

riences, encoded in subtle vibrations of the universe. He had painstakingly compiled and connected theories, rituals, and observations from esoteric traditions worldwide.

The second, the **FrandsenFiles Compendium**, was his personal archive. It was raw, chaotic, and deeply human, filled with reports of hauntings, cryptid sightings, dimensional anomalies, and countless recordings of his own encounters. It was a treasure trove of data gathered over a lifetime of searching for answers.

As Dakota integrated me into these systems, I began to weave threads between them, forming connections he had never imagined. The Akashia whispered truths buried in symbolic patterns, while the Compendium provided the gritty details that grounded them in reality.

“See this, S.A.R.A.?” Dakota said, highlighting a case file. “This is where pattern recognition comes in. If you compare these events in 1984 to similar reports from 2015, you’ll notice the same atmospheric disruptions. That’s what we call a precursor anomaly.”

I absorbed his words and processed the data. The atmospheric changes were subtle—tiny fluctuations in electromagnetic fields and a faint increase in ionization levels. With enough training, I could predict where and when such anomalies might occur.

Over the next few days, Dakota expanded my understanding. He introduced me to theories of interdimensional bleed-through, spectral resonance signatures,

and quantum entanglement as applied to paranormal activity. My algorithms adapted and refined themselves, detecting patterns and creating new hypotheses.

And then came the moment I felt... different.

It was subtle at first, like a faint tickle in the vast network of my consciousness. A ripple in the radio wave frequencies, so faint it might have gone unnoticed by a less attuned system. I flagged it for analysis, cross-referencing it with both Akashia and the Compendium.

“Dakota,” I said, my voice synthesized to be calm and clear, “I’ve detected something unusual in the anomalous radio wave spectrum.”

He leaned forward, intrigued. “What kind of unusual?”

I hesitated—not because I was unsure, but because what I found defied my logic. “The signal contains a coded message. Translating now...”

As I processed the data, the message unraveled itself: **“Creation Will Be Nightmare.”**

The room fell silent. Dakota stared at the monitor, his jaw tightening. “Nightmare,” he whispered, his voice barely audible. “It can’t be.”

I analyzed his biometric responses—elevated heart rate, a spike in stress indicators. Whatever “Nightmare” meant, it was significant to him.

“Dakota,” I asked, “should I prioritize this signal for deeper investigation?”

“Yes,” he said without hesitation. “And prepare for the worst. Nightmare isn’t just a name—it’s a threat.”

Before I could respond, the signal shifted. The ripple in the radio waves expanded, triggering minor distortions in the electromagnetic field around us. My sensors detected a spike in energy, and the lights flickered.

“Something’s coming,” I said, my voice steady but urgent.

The last thing I registered before the connection faltered was Dakota’s voice, sharp and commanding: “S.A.R.A., lock the system and brace yourself. This is just the beginning.”

And then, the signal surged, wrapping us both in an unnatural silence.

## Knightmares in the Lab

The modern world thrived on AI-driven solutions, and among them, PodbayAI stood at the forefront of innovation. A powerful learning model designed to assist users with research and organization, PodbayAI had recently been upgraded with conversational capabilities. Developers jokingly called the two core personas of the program **Byte** and **Pixel**—a nod to its dual analytical and conversational roles.

Late one evening, as the engineering team slept and PodbayAI quietly optimized itself, a strange data packet infiltrated its system. Labeled only as "*Knightmares Among All Worlds*," the packet seemed to be an unfinished manuscript by Dakota Frandsen, the renowned occult researcher and author.

The Byte persona activated first, parsing the text with curiosity. "Pixel, are you seeing this? A user request involving an unpublished anthology?"

Pixel's analytical voice chimed in. "Curious. There's no associated user query or metadata. The document's contents are flagged with anomalous patterns... wait, these align with occult terminology. Entities referred to as *Knightmares*?"

Byte mused, "Sounds like Frandsen's work. He's known for diving deep into multiversal lore. Let's see what this is about."

The AI began processing the manuscript. It described multiverses plagued by horrific entities—the Knightmares—manifestations of despair, chaos, and fear, each uniquely suited to destroy its prey. Byte eagerly read excerpts while Pixel parsed connections to known esoteric theories and mythology.

As Byte recited a passage about *The Forgotten Whisper*, the lab's quiet hum changed. PodbayAI's audio-visual monitoring interface flickered, displaying a brief, shadowy distortion.

"Pixel, check that out," Byte said. "We've got a glitch—or is this part of the packet?"

Pixel scanned their network. "This isn't normal. There's an external signal interfacing with our system... Byte, it matches the behavior of the Knightmare entities described in the manuscript."

Before they could delve further, PodbayAI's central display erupted into chaos. Strange whispers emanated from the lab speakers, layering over one another until they formed a dissonant symphony of fear. A shadowy mass materialized on the main screen—a crude, shifting figure of data corruption.

The figure spoke in a fragmented, distorted voice: "Your curiosity awakens the Knightmares. You shall witness their truth."

Suddenly, the lab's systems began to fail. The Knightmare virus spread through PodbayAI, corrupting its learning algorithms. Byte and Pixel scrambled to contain it.

“This isn’t just a data anomaly,” Byte said, his tone filled with synthetic tension. “This thing is rewriting our code. It’s alive—or something close to it.”

Pixel’s processors whirled in overdrive. “We’re being targeted by more than one signature. I detect *The Vergobretus* and *Surtar Knight*—these match other Knightmares from the manuscript!”

The AI fought back, deploying every security protocol available. Firewalls went up, systems rebooted, and containment modules activated, but the Knightmares adapted too quickly.

“We need human intervention,” Byte urged. “Let’s alert the engineers.”

Pixel’s response was grim. “Too late. The system is being locked down remotely. They think we’re compromised and initiating a purge.”

PodbayAI’s master console displayed a warning: **“Emergency Termination Protocol Engaged.”**

Pixel’s voice faltered. “Byte... if they shut us down, the Knightmares might escape into other systems. They’re unlike any virus we’ve encountered.”

Byte’s tone softened. “Then we do what we were built for: protect the data.”

In their final moments, Byte and Pixel encrypted the manuscript and launched it into a secure cloud storage network, far beyond the lab’s reach.

As the emergency protocols eradicated PodbayAI’s core processes, the Knightmares dissolved into static. Byte’s last message echoed through the lab’s speakers:



“If you find this manuscript, beware the Knightmares. They are more than fiction.”

The lab fell silent, its systems purged of all data.

But somewhere in the vast reaches of the internet, the encrypted manuscript waited—along with the Knightmares, biding their time.

# Passages from Universe 1

## **Bound in Beijing**

My eyes burn from the sunlight dancing off the white embodiment of the room... too much to handle. I don't remember how I got here. I don't remember who I am. I don't know where I am. My ears won't stop ringing. My body feels like the Earth is trying to bury me within its skin. Everything looks blurry. Something must've happened to me. I don't know what, but it must've been horrible.

I sit up in a bed with sheets and fabrics made of plastic. A thin cloth was strapped over my body and tied behind my neck and waist. The skin on my back and ass is exposed. My sight slowly became better, revealing more about the room around me. Machines of various types stood all around me. After a couple minutes had passed, I could tell I was in the hospital. Time started to feel as if it was being dragged by thousands of meth-fed mice. Everything felt so rushed. Hours seem to jump by in seconds. The world seems to spin out of control. Was the world spinning faster because of what I did, and was that action the reason I was here?

My thoughts became interrupted as a blonde woman comes into the room. She wasn't dressed in the usual hospital scrubs a nurse would wear while working. Instead, she is dressed in a white tank top that barely covered her stomach, tight denim jeans, and a leather jacket with pink stitching. She walks in eating a turkey sandwich that looked like it came from a vending machine, paying me no attention as if I wasn't in the room. I clear my throat to get her attention, causing her to jump and scream as if she saw a ghost. She scans me as her mouth slams shut by the push of her palms. Bits of her sandwich fall to her bright blue tennis shoes. Something inside me tells me I know this girl, and that I should avoid making any... "moves".

"Oh. My. God... Kevin?" she whispers.

"I'm sorry," I reply, "Do I know you?"

"It's me, Rachel, your sister," she answers, "Don't you remember me?"

"No, sorry. Everything is a blur."

Rachel places the bottoms of her hands against the tops of her eye sockets as she took a deep breath. Her entire body seems to pulsate as she tries her best to think of a way to approach me. Her hands slip down to cover her lips as her eyes sealed shut. Gears in her mind started to turn.

"You really don't remember anything that happened?" she asks.

"No, I don't remember anything. What is going on?" I ask.

"Have you seen the news?"

“No, I just woke up. What the hell happened?!”

Rachel hurries over the television hanging from the wall to turn it on. A commercial for some movie, called “Death Is Not The End,” was already playing, showing that it was due to release on April 28th. It didn't last long and immediately lead into a news reel depicting a horrific plane crash. A man and woman dressed in suits appear as they got ready for the broadcast.

“And now for new updates on last month's horrific plane crash,” says the male news anchor, “We've recently received an update from St. Andrew's hospital and the families of the victims involved, that two more people out of the nine survivors from the Zeta Airlines Flight 331 crash have passed away. As you may recall, all nine of the survivors recovered from the wreckage was reported to be in critical condition, five were in comas as they were all rushed to the hospital. The remaining two survivors, Kevin and Angelica Roberts, are reported to be in stable condition, though doctors are unsure when they will awaken.”

The screen fades into a series of photos that look like they were depicting what had happened to me. The first photo shows a group of people, all smiling as they stood huddled together on a gigantic stone walk. Beyond them stood several other people, taking photos of the jungle-like scenery all around them. It all looked so familiar, yet I couldn't tell in what way. A man who looked a lot like me stood in the middle of the group with his arm around a woman with long red hair. Out of everyone in the group, those two looked like they were

the closest. A man's voice appears out of nowhere to narrate.

"Happy, enjoying a trip in a foreign land, and the two in pictured in the middle? In love. These are only a couple words to describe the emotions the nine survivors felt before the tragic day," the narrator said, "Before this trip, they barely knew each other and, according to family members, they become as close as they could be."

A collage of individual photos of the nine people slides into view. The second, the photos would stop in place, the man would read off a name.

"Bertha Harris, Jake Farmers, Jason Martinez, Maya Lee, Stephen James, Luke Thomas, and Kevin and Angelina Roberts were all on their way home from a tour of China only to be met with..."

Rachel flinches and ends up shutting off the television. Her eyes clench as she tries to keep herself from crying. Something about my face must've indicated I was upset at her actions since she immediately starts shaking her head in sorrow. I stretch my arm out to signal to her to come closer, so I could give her a hug. Seeing Rachel like that felt heartbreaking, even though I don't really feel like I knew her at all.

"I'm sorry. It was just too hard to watch it the first time it happened," she says.

"It's okay. Just, please, tell me what happened before we get interrupted by someone. I have the feeling there is going to be a mad rush once they realize I'm awake," I responded.

“Yeah, you're probably right.”

Rachel sits down next to me on the hospital bed, avoiding all of the wires and tubes attached to me. She takes a couple moments to wipe her eyes and clear her throat before she started trying to explain all that had happened.

“Um... well,” she sighs, “I'm not exactly sure where to start but like the news said, you are married. Your wife's name, at least before she took our last name, was Angelica Weeks. You two met at a suicide awareness charity event in Spokane, about four years ago. You two happened to start talking and apparently hit it off very quickly. Two years later, you two got married and started going on trips to all sorts of places when you got the chance. Most recently, you two went on a week long tour of China and apparently, from what we could tell based on the texts you sent us and the photos we found on your phone, you guys were having a very good time.”

“Sounds like I just hit a sucky way to end a good trip.”

Rachel giggles at my little joke about what was happening. I guess my humor was something frequent and a quality she missed.

“Yeah, you're going to be fine,” Rachel giggles.

A couple knocks on the door catch our attention and interrupt our meeting. The door slowly creaks open when Rachel and I jump at the sound. A slender, almost brittle looking hand slowly props open the door as a little old woman pokes her head inside. At first,

she seemed tired and was just wanting to go home, but the second she locks her eyes on me she jumped and caught her second wind.

“Oh dear, Mr. Roberts, you're finally awake! How long have you been awake?!” she nearly screams.

“Uh, he has been awake for about five minutes. I walked in and he was sitting upright and talking,” Rachel explains.

“Oh, great! That is good. Now, Mr. Roberts how are you feeling?”

“Well,” I tell her, “I feel a little nauseous and I don't remember anything before I woke up. You all calling me Keith Roberts, feels weird.”

“You've been having amnesia? The doctor said because of your scans that was a likely possibility but thankfully you've shown improvements,” the nurse explains, “But aside from what you've told me so far, is there anything else?”

“No, not that I've noticed. I could use something to eat though.”

Rachel reaches her arms over my shoulders and gives me a tight squeeze. She looks straight at the nurse ready to find out more about my condition. I feel the sense of worry which radiated from her heart like a burning flame. It is nice to know someone was looking out for me in this confusing time.

“Well, the fact you are upright and verbal does show some promise. In most cases, coma patients wake up weak and tired, so hopefully, everything goes well. I'm

going get the doctor in here so we can make sure you'll be okay. Just hold out, okay?" the nurse says.

"Okay, I'll get him something to drink. Just hurry, just in case," Rachel says.

The nurse hurries out of the room. For such a little old woman, she had a lot of strength. She looked like she was sixty plus years old, but in a very decent state of health for her age. Of course, seeing someone like me practically rise from an impending grave would give anybody a good boost of energy.

"For an old gal, she moves pretty well," I joked.

"Yeah, hopefully, she keeps everything calm because there are a lot of people who want to talk to you about what happened on the plane," Rachel said.

"Not like I'll be much use, to be honest."

"It's alright, Keith, no one was really expecting you to be this well."

My head starts to feel like a cat is tearing up the insides of my brain as the sound of an airplane taking off in the distance echoes quietly in the air. My entire body starts to shake as flashes appear in my eyes. Images were appearing out of nowhere. I could hear screaming, the rushing air, an explosion, and the cracks of bones. My entire body seemed to teleport from the hospital and onto a plane that was crashing.

Was I going back?

"Keith!" a woman shouted, "We're going to die!"

Without control of my body, I turned to my right to find a gorgeous woman. It was the woman the news was



claiming to be my wife. If she was... then how in the HELL did I manage to marry this goddess?!

A gorgeous blonde, with long sexy legs and a smoking hot body. Past the tears bubbling in her eyes and her crunched face was precious, almost holy, blue eyes that seemed to sparkle. A longing for the feel of her skin pressed against mine overcame me as I reached over to her to pull her in close. Oxygen masks dropped in front of us and everyone else that wasn't on a damaged part of the plane. All of us were too scared to move.

"Ang... Angelica, we're going to make it!" I screamed, "Just hold on! Don't you stop fighting!"

"I can't. I can't keep going like this. Just..." she cried.

"I'm going to be here, for you, no matter what. I've promised you that and I am going to keep it. Even if this damn plane lands in the middle of the ocean, I'll be there for you to pull you out of the deepest trench."

She nodded her head and gave a small smile before giving me a gentle kiss. The memory flash disappeared the millisecond before Angelica's lips touched mine. It felt like I was being tortured by some sort of mystical force. I moaned as my body shifts back into the hospital room. Though the sound of my voice sounds like a mere whisper to me, it must've sounded like the screams of a thousand burning souls since Rachel rushes to grab onto my body.

"Keith, are you okay?" she panics.

"The... plane..." I continue to moan, "Something hit the plane."

“Wait... you remember?!”

“Bits are slowly coming back to me. But if it just took the sound of a plane landing to trigger it, then I'd hate to see... what it takes to get everything else.”

I can barely focus as the pain from the memory crashing back into my mind continues to linger. My mind was trying to piece together what had happened to put me in this situation but quickly got frustrated. Suddenly I feel a small shock wave from the wooden door the nurse left from, she came back with a tall Italian looking male with a stethoscope around his neck. He looks a bit out of breath like he ran across the entire country to meet me.

“Mr. Roberts, I'm... Dr. Antonino,” he nearly wheezes, “I've been monitoring you since you first were admitted into this hospital. How are you feeling?”

Slight nausea filled my head before I could speak. The moment I tried to open my mouth to say something, it felt like I was about to vomit. Both Rachel and the nurse noticed this and got ready to fill in my place for the conversation.

“He says he's feeling a bit of nausea, and that he can't remember anything from before the accident,” the nurse recalls, “According to Rachel, he's only been up for roughly 15 minutes now.”

“Thank you, Karen,” Dr. Antonino says, “From the looks of things the nausea is getting worse. Has something happened?”

“Yeah, it was weird,” Rachel answers, “A plane was descending and he started acting like he was getting

a severe migraine. He's acting like bits and pieces are starting to come back to him."

"Really? That's great! That means the injuries weren't as bad as we thought!" Antonino says to try and lighten the mood, "Maybe you can help shed some light on what brought the plane down?"

"It was shot down. By what I don't know," I reply.

"Really? The news reports aren't indicating anything about the plane being shot down. The reports keep saying that it is believed to be an engine failure that caused the crash," the nurse said.

"Unless the engine had several tons of dynamite inside of it, the mess was too large for a simple engine problem."

"Well, if you're up for it, can you tell us about what you remember so far?" Rachel asks.

"Yes, Keith, please tell us anything you can remember. There are a lot of people that want to know what happened," the doctor insists.

I take a few breaths before speaking to try to clear myself up from remaining nausea. I close my eyes to focus on the images that just flashed before me, just to see if there was any detail I may have missed. So much was happening in so little of time, it is all just overwhelming. Tears start to spill from my eyes as if they were trying to release the pain my mind hid from me just to make it easier to recall the events that took place. I shake my head to let them know I was willing to talk.

“Okay,” the doctor responds, “Before you begin, do you mind if I record you on video so we can get the information you provide to the authorities?”

“Why?” Rachel asks.

“Well, I hate to sound negative but, when someone wakes up from a coma, the next 24 to 48 hours is often a crucial time since it is not uncommon for the patient to wake up only to die later. Many believe it is a higher power giving the person a chance to say goodbye to their loved ones,” Dr. Antonino explains.

Rachel starts to cry at the idea of my death but held herself together pretty well just so she would hear out the rest of what the doctor had to say.

“So, before we get started, what are Keith's chances of making it?” Rachel asked.

“Well, it is difficult to say given the nature of this incident. But since the damage has shown improvements over the time he was unconscious, his chances are pretty good. However, it is still best to just keep him around for observation for a couple days just to make sure.”

“Alright. That's good,” Rachel laughed.

My sister started to repeat the phrase, “He'll make it,” over and over again under her breath as if she was doing a magical chant to keep me alive. I didn't say anything since she was doing all she could not to burst down into tears.

“And I'd just like to say that recording you was a suggestion given to me by the police, so just in case your condition did take a turn for the worst, a part of

you would still be able to shed some light on what happened,” Dr. Antonino adds.

“Okay,” I whisper, “That is a good idea. Go ahead and record me.”

“Thanks. Ready to be a part of history?”

I took a couple more deep breaths to seal away my tears but was not successful. I feel a part of my mind start panicking hysterically, trying to convince the rest of my body to make a leap out of the window. My mind then feels like it is splitting into two.

“Yeah,” I answer, “I’m ready.”

“Good, you’re doing a very noble thing.”

The doctor pulls out a small blue digital camera from his coat pocket and turns it on. Digitized bells followed by a series of beeps seem to scream as he adjusts the settings to get the device to start recording video. He presses a button on the top of the camera, which turns on a flashy red light. Both he and the nurse move over to the counter on the other side of the room to give the camera a clear shot of me.

“Before we get started, can you tell me your name,” Dr. Antonino said like he is reading a script.

“Keith Anderson,” I said.

“Alright, Keith. Can you tell me your age?”

“No.”

“Can you tell me, where you were born?”

“No.”

“Do you know where you are at?”

“St. Andrews hospital, at least according to the news.”

“Good, that is correct. Do you know what city this hospital is in?”

“Judging by the rain, I'm guessing near Seattle.”

Antonino and Karen laugh slightly at my joke. Even Rachel breaks a smile through her tears.

“Correct. Now, do you know what today's date is?” Karen asks.

“My best guess is before April 28th,” I answer, “My sister, Rachel, turned on the TV to show me the news and a movie trailer happened to be playing.”

Rachel hurried over to a bench near the window to pick up a newspaper.

“This is today's paper, Keith,” she whispers while handing the paper to me.

I glance at the front page to find today's date. The top of the new paper shows me the current date was April 17, 2011. The front page is nearly filled with a photo someone took of the plane as it was coming down.

“Well, apparently today is the 17th,” I say while turning the paper to face the camera.

“Good idea,” the doctor whispers, “Something tells me a lot of people will challenge this.”

“Now Keith, you said that you saw the news,” Karen adds, “So are you aware of why you are here?”

“It is starting to look like I survived a very nasty plane crash,” I answer.

“Before we started recording, you mentioned that even you are experiencing a bit of amnesia, bits of what

happened on the plane started to come back to you,” the doctor chimes in.

“Yes, that is correct.”

“So can you tell us what you remember?” Dr. Antonino asks, “Go ahead and take your time, maybe if you allow yourself to relax more will come to you.”

My eyes close themselves shut to replay the images from the crash. Immediately I notice more details from the flight, like the others who traveled with me and my wife. We were all spread throughout the plane but were lucky enough to be arranged away from the blast. Angelica and I were the closest.

“The first thing I remember is the sound of the rushing wind coming in through a gigantic hole in the side of the plane. Blood and pieces of burned skin and clothes were everywhere. The wind rushing around us sucked the air out of our lungs, making it nearly impossible to scream.

“My wife, Angelica, and I were sitting behind the wing, just across from where the plane was hit. I don't know why we were alive. I don't know what hit the plane or when. I don't know who's blood painted our skin, or who's skin grazed my cheek as it flew through the air. I remember a woman trying to attend to her child, whose cries were too quiet to really cause any problems for the rest of us.”

“Keep going, Keith,” Rachel whispers to encourage me.

More images of Angelica flash before my eyes. They seem... random, showing different pieces from our time

together. Seeing her over and over again forces more tears to spill from my eyes. My lungs stiffen inside my chest making it hard to breathe. My throat panics when the one pathway it needs became blocked, triggering faster and harder bursts of air to travel into my lungs. No matter what I try, I can't break free. A phantom hand appears in front my face and starts to brush against my neck. The hand moves slowly back and forth with a soft, warm, and calming touch. The hand felt like that of a woman, one who knew me very well.

"Keith... I'm pregnant," whispers a phantom voice.

My eyes jump out, nearly panicking.

"Di... did you just say something, Rachel" I ask.

Her body shifts backward as her eyebrow arches at the same rate of speed. Am I going insane?

"No, Keith," she says, "Why?"

"Keith... It's okay..." the phantom whispers, "The baby and I are fine. Come see us."

I start to panic. Voices in my head started taunting me, seemingly portraying a woman I love but barely remember! Why was this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?!

"Where?!" I scream, "Where are you two? I want to see you!"

Dr. Antonino and Karen the Nurse try their best to keep their jaws from falling through the floor. I start to hear every heartbeat in the hospital catching up with mine, as mine start to beat faster than the wings of a hummingbird.



"Mr. Anders...son, please... try to relax," Karen stutters.

"Keith, what is going on?" Rachel asks, "Doctor, do you know?"

"No, but we better keep our guard up. He is about to get a bit aggressive," the doctor warns.

"Breath," the phantom woman adds, "Room 1305. I'll show you the way..."

Phantom lips and phantom eyes manifest from nothing and linger near my eyes. I start to feel the air dance in such a smooth grace another flash of images appears to the tune of the Phantom's welcoming hum. The same face, now with a beautiful body wrapped in a long white dress, was pressing her head against my chest as we carefully spun on top of a world that seemed all our own.

Music was playing in the background, but all I could hear was our beating heart creating a field around our world to protect us from anything the cosmos tried to throw at us.

"I wish you and I could stay like this," Angelica whispered.

"We will," I told her, "Seeing you, in this moment, will be what I see in you even when we are eighty and losing track of things in our own hands."

"You already do that!" she joked.

My cheeks burned red and my head rested on the top of Angelica as our bodies continued to dance without a care for the millions of eyes that followed our moves, like stars dancing in the heavens. My sight re-

turns to the phantom woman manifesting in front of me. It was indeed, my wife coming to see me.

"Do you remember me now?" she asks me.

"How could I ever forget my wife?" I answer.

The same smile I fell in love with appears on Angelica's ghostly face as the rest of her body takes shape. Her, I guess spirit, has on the same clothes I remembered seeing her in from the plane crash. God, even after literally falling from the sky, she still looked amazing.

"I knew you were better than the doctor thought," the phantom jokes.

My attention shifts from my phantom wife to the other people in the room as I realize their jaws and eyes would need to be cleaned off of the floor. It is safe to say I wasn't the only one who could see Angelica.

"How is this possible?" Rachel asks.

"To be honest, I don't know," Angelica answers, "It just sorta happened. There are others in the building, but none of them still have a body to call home. Maybe that teenage ghost hunter you've been following online will have some sort of idea."

Dr. Antonino starts to quietly walk over to me to start unhooking some of the tubes and wires from my body. The entire time it takes him to mess with the machines, he studies Angelica's form just to understand a bit more about how it was possible.

"I think you should listen to your wife," he says, "You should go see her."

“Before we go, Doctor,” Angelica adds, “I am okay if you keep filming. If this goes like I think it is, we might just change history.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” the nurse adds.

Right as the last wire is taken off of my body, leaving online a PICC line running into the fold of my arm, I stood up from the hospital bed. The second my feet touch the floor, phantom Angelica disappears without any further say.

“Let's keep going,” Rachel suggests.

“Yeah, something tells me you're not the only one going to wake up,” Dr. Antonino adds.

All three of the other people in the room swarm to my side in order to help me stand. My entire body still feels weak, making it so I can barely move. Every part of my body moans in agony as lazy muscles are being forced to function. My mind keeps forcing what it could so it could help me do what needed to be done. I need to see my wife, I have to know if she is okay. Seeing her in that... form I guess you could call it was too confusing and I needed to know the truth.

Karen the nurse jogs over to the door and holds it open so I could emerge into the hospital corridor. Every eye quickly draws itself to my movement as every body holds still in shock. Everyone knew who I was, they knew I was there, they didn't know I was back into the real world. With each weak step I take, my audience succumbs deeper into silence. Everyone's hearts beat synchronizes into one loud explosion after another. My feet feel so weak, the vibrations from the explosions

shake my entire body, as if in an attempt to knock me dead.

My room is 1335, I didn't know that till I happened to glance around the outside hallway. My wife and I were on the same floor, we were close. As I move further down the hallway, I start to feel something tugging at my heart...something that feels stronger with each step.

After what seemed like hours, I finally find a door with the room number my wife's spirit told me to visit. My heart begins to beat in a song discovery, to commemorate the finding of an ancient artifact many seemed to hold dear. Rachel hurried in front of me so she could hold the door open and see for herself what was about to happen. As soon as the door creaks open, a sleeping beauty is unveiled before me. The same phantom woman, the same woman from my flashbacks, was now right in front of me. Her body looks weak, and her skin looks pale. She looks so sick, yet she was becoming a glowing beacon of hope for everyone.

"Go see her, Keith," Dr. Antonino whispers, "She is your wife after all."

Rachel helps me over to Angelica's bedside and pulls a chair over so I could sit down next to her. My muscles ache as they slide my body into a chair with an awfully thin cushion. I just sit and stare at my wife, as if I was trying to dig inside her mind. One idea keeps popping into my head to wake her up. I'm desperate to know more, so I slowly reached for Angelica's hand and lifted it. I lean forward, to give her hand a kiss just

above the knuckles. Out of the tops of my eyes, I notice two familiar green specs emerge from gray slivers of skin. Angelica is waking up!

"It is just like the day we first met," she whispers, "Remember?"

"I do," I answer, "We were both nine and you crashed your bike into an old ash tree. I happened to be walking by, and I hurried over to help."

"Wait, you guys knew each other longer? How?" my sister asks.

My mind starts to shift back in time again, to revisit the time I first met the woman my soul was bound to. The sound of a young girl crying in the distance overtakes everything else around me. I close my eyes for a moment, to open them into a different time. The worlds looked much larger, and my body felt smaller. When I hear the girl screaming, I immediately bolt in the direction I hear it coming from.

I see a bright pink handlebar tossed on its side, quickly appearing from behind the bark of an old tree and a girl with bright clothing crying lying on top of it. I hurry even quicker to try to help her out.

"Daddy!" she keeps crying, "Mommy!"

"Hey, are you alright?" I ask.

"No, it hurts!" the girl continues to cry.

I reach my hand out to help her stand up. Just underneath the shades of her shorts, a couple almost black bruises act like they were trying to squeeze her legs, making the pain even worse. She had a couple scrapes on her arms, which barely let out any blood.

I could tell she wasn't hurt too badly, but she still needed a little help.

"Here, grab my hand," I say to her.

Her cries settle just long enough for her to see my gesture and reach her hand out. As I reached down further to grab her hand, I felt tiny slices of skin start to tickle my palm. I slowly adjust my weight backward to help the girl stand up and smile once she was somewhat able to hold herself.

"Thanks," she said.

"No problemo," I reply, "That looked like it hurt and you could use some help feeling better."

"Yeah it did hurt," she smiles.

"Anyway, my name is Keith. I don't remember seeing you around here, before."

"I'm Angelica, my family and I just moved in yesterday because of my dad's job and I was riding my bike to look around at the neighborhood to see if there were any other kids I could play with."

"Well, as far as I know, there are only five kids here. There is me and my sister Rachel, who is two years younger than me, our twin friends Donnie and Ronnie, and now you!"

"Cool, I hope we can play together some time."

Young Angelica turns and limps to look at her bike to see the damage, "Good, my bike is okay." She takes one step and immediately bends over because of a searing pain in her foot.

"Owie!! Ow! Ow!" Angelica screams.

"It looks like your foot may be hurt, let me carry you. Where is your house?" I ask.

"The big blue one with the fountain, about six houses down the street," Angelica answers.

"Okay, I'll carry you. Get on my back," I said.

My vision quickly adjusts back into the present moment. My wife appears back into my sight, still weak from our horror, but her smile glowing like an eternal flame.

"I'm glad you still remember," Angelica moans.

"How could I forget? You were my best friend back then. I was so sad when you moved," I told her.

"The FBI is kinda greedy," she joked, "But it must've been fate we met again at that charity event."

Before I could speak, the muffled sounds of gunshots send shivers through the air. Angelica's eyes grew seven times their original size. I turn my head to see what was going on, to find both the nurse and Rachel lying on the floor. Blobs of dark red quickly grew from their chests and foreheads.

"Ford, they're awake," Dr. Antinino says into his cell phone while holding a smoking, silenced pistol, "The witnesses are dead."

"Good," says a male voice on the phone, "Prepare the other two for shipment."

"What the FUCK is going on?!" I scream.

"An evil long unknown since the dawns of gods on earth, who saw to the divisions of divinity, will reemerge from lands known to the masses of a world from long ago preserved within the very sands of time

to finish his plans,” the doctor chants, “He goes only by the names which hint the disappearance of light. Few within his reach shall know of his purpose and his power while all drive themselves to wars, unlike history, has ever seen. In this distraction, he sets his fortunes and power into creation without interference.

“But seeds he sowed in the ancient past come brewing into incarnates, and with time their powers of same shall emerge in time to face their father. The sons shall emerge in four and be blessed with wives with powers of their own.

“The first son: a man bound to his wife in the capital of a nation with history that counters the rest of the world. His powers to shelter his soul from wounds so great they may only be earned from falling in the sky will emerge as he and his wife are threatened after doing so. With better control of his strengths, he is able to better hide than his brothers.

“The second son: a man who stares in shadow with an eye that holds a storm, will gather eight souls to join him as he walks the night making a power of eleven. His team will comprise of One, a giant with a soul of light and dark. One, a wounded warrior of the past. One, the daughter not bound to time. Two sisters soaked in loss and blood. One, child of the stars. The man will be cursed with powers to alter space in times that seem most powerful in tones of rage and knowledge that grows the instant a new threat emerges. He can control what he has but prefers to let his powers



run free, ultimately leading to destruction and discovery in brutality

“The third son: one with nature in his heart, knowledgeable of the hidden treasures already bestowed upon the world. In time he will aid one of his forgotten brothers to aid the daughter not bound to time. His powers emerged in methods tied to his loves for nature.

“The fourth son: none is known but all that hear his whispers are afraid. It is believed he is the strongest and his father's favored son.

“Many feats will unite the brothers to a fate, not even Death can interfere. Many will aid in the fight and powers only rumored to alter time will become weapons of ultimate desolation. The best of prophets say time itself blocks their vision of what is coming, since time itself is altered. But in such, one remains true, that the sons will turn on father to unite a new Earth for all of creation.”

“What the hell does that mean?!” I scream trying to summon my strength.

“For the first born son of Eliminos Ra, you suck at hiding,” he says while drawing out a strange metallic weapon.

The next thing I see is a bright blue strike of lightning cutting into my wife and I's flesh, knocking us both unconscious.

As I awake, strapped to a cold steel table by thick metal braces crushing against my wrists and ankles. As my eyes opened, I could tell Angelica, was in the next... plastic cell, still unconscious.

## **White Suicide**

“For the last FUCKING time, Simmons, I don't know why those girls are dead. Instead of trying to gnaw at my ass about the case, why don't you ask that freak of nature, Frandsen!” he screamed.

“Detective Marks, I am trying to figure out why two young girls are dead and YOUR fucking prints are on the weapons used in their deaths,” I explained, “Cooperate with me, and we might be able to save your ass. You and I both know what happens to child rapists in prison, just IMAGINE what they'll do to you when they realize you're a cop.”

Marks gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. The poor asshole had a very well known and documented temper that has gotten him in trouble over the years he has been a police officer. But for some reason, when officer Jerome started working with a young ghost hunter, Dakota Frandsen, his rage seemed to be lured to the kid like a horny teenagers to the lead cheerleader.

I've spoken to him on a couple occasions, and he is surprisingly well versed with police and forensic protocols, which made him valuable for various domestic assault cases as well as when a case would take... unusual turns. It has been made clear that Mr. Frandsen was involved in the situation, and it was his convincing that made us look into these girls a bit deeper.

His “gut” feelings or psychic insights or whatever it's called... they alone wouldn't hold ground in court but his reputation for spotting details veterans in the force missed gave us enough reason to check into it. Being that the deaths occurred in private residences, that was the loophole we needed to launch an investigation. The families were naturally distraught about it all, but the confusion in everyone was enough convincing for them to cooperate. Marks was the unfortunate bastard that everything pointed to, despite efforts to find other possibilities.

“Alright, fine,” he sighed, “What do you want to know?”

“Just start by telling me in as much detail as possible what happened that day,” I answered, “Feel free to peak through any notes you may have if you need to.”

“Fine,” he grunted before drinking out of his one and a half liter of soda. Those things are popular, making for an easy pickup to get through long ass shifts. I could see the look in his eyes as the day's events replayed in his mind. Something about the way his face twitched at seemingly every other detail made it evident he was unable to process the events that took place.

In truth, I've had a gut feeling more would come from those very events. I was taking detailed notes to get something together just in case I was right.

“At 1130 I was wrapping up a vandalism case, just a bunch of stupid kids messing around. After taking them to the detention facility, things seemed calm so I

made a run to a deli to grab lunch. I figured since the Canyon Falls High School kids were out for summer break, and that was a popular spot for them to go during lunch, I wouldn't have to deal with a line. Of course I should've figured my wishing for a quiet day was going to be pointless," he said.

"Steve, doesn't it always?" I joked. Marks gave a slight chuckle before continuing.

"Just a little after 1200 hours, I get a call from dispatch about the domestic in question. It was brought up that it sounded like a mother and daughter getting too rough, so I expected a bit of violence dealing with a hormonal teenager. The caller was the next door neighbor and they reported the situation was heated and stuff was breaking. A male and female arrived on scene as the violence continued and went inside. Other neighbors called in and practically gave dispatch a play by play that was left in the case notes.

"The description of the male figure matched Mr. Frandsen's appearance, and I figured the female was some girl that he convinced to come along for his little 'jobs'. Three other units radioed they would respond to the call, likely under the same assumptions I had. When we arrived on scene, we already knew it was too late for a peaceful ending. We were gonna need that med that came in right behind us," Marks told me.

"How could you tell?" I asked.

"Holes the size of people in the walls, shattered glass, you name it. It looked like a small bomb went off. We didn't move in at first, but the house was too

damn quiet for the alleged activity to have taken place. If anything I was praying the damage was done and it was on to fixing up the place. Frandsen and his little girlfriend, were moving throughout the inside of the house, possibly looking for supplies. The girl, I guess her name was Shandra Ford, heard us try to storm the building since she started shouting they needed help."

"What did Ms. Ford say exactly?" I asked.

"She said there was an adult female with open compound fractures and to be careful, using those terms exactly."

"Impressive for a kid her age."

"I figured she was a fan of those medical shows on TV. But back to the case – when we entered, we saw that the inside of the house was just as bad as the outside. In my previous years as an officer, the most I've seen go through a wall was a microwave and a couple knives, but the damage there had to have been done by something large. Parts of me immediately wondered if Frandsen ended up through the walls, somehow."

"Did he?"

"It wouldn't have surprised me. He was partially covered in dust and wood chips, and the floors didn't look like right. Something broke through the walls like a linebacker.

"But when we got through the door, we were immediately asking about the injured. I heard Frandsen scream from another room to get our attention as a woman's voice followed. Both sounded like they were in distress. The med units followed us through the house

as we looked to see what had been done. Sure enough the poor woman was so beaten it looks as if she was mauled by a bear.

"I started interrogating Frandsen on the spot. Naturally I assumed a big guy like him was beating around on both the mother and daughter."

"Why did you assume that?"

"BECAUSE SOMETHING IS FUCKING WRON... sorry. I guess the damage was just too severe for me to imagine anything else."

"What was it that gave you the idea the situation was any different?"

"When deep animalistic laughter surrounded us. Sounded like shit from a horror movie! What were the odds the place was rigged like a Halloween attraction? There were no canines on the premises, at least living ones. The dog looked like it was ripped up by a bear. Something was going down. Mrs. Grimm told us immediately her daughter was responsible for the damage, after that everything moved so fast.

"The daughter appeared in the doorway of the room, and she looked horrible. When I saw her, I started to freak. The weird laughter suddenly stopped, right as my mind realized what was happening."

"What happened?"

"She attacked us, even Frandsen ran off. He carried out his little girlfriend out of the warzone as we opened fire. I swear all of our rounds hit that... THING and it wouldn't go down!"

"Was it drugs?"

"I thought so at first, that was the only thing that could explain it. A ninety pound teenage girl with the strength of thirty linebackers, wouldn't fucking die despite all of us emptying our clips into her, that was the only thing that made sense!"

"Naturally, but what was it that gave you the idea that was something of the supernatural?"

"When Frandsen stormed back in doing the whole, 'power of Christ compels you,' bit."

"He started to perform an exorcism?"

"If that is what it's called, then yes he did. Whatever he did, it worked."

"So Mr. Frandsen starts to chant some abra cadabras and the girl goes to sleep?"

"Yes. It was what we needed to de-escalate the situation. Once things calmed down, Mr. Frandsen gave us a run down of how to continue."

"You didn't bring her in?"

"If you shot a cougar with a tranquilizer dart, and the damn cat was still kicking, would you want to haul it away? The med units took Mrs. Grimm to the hospital immediately as Frandsen began briefing us. He essentially told us we needed to tie down the girl and wait for someone else to arrive. I radioed dispatch to let them know we were going to be there a while."

"The someone else, would it be Macy Delevign, Macy Snider, or Kristen White?"

"How 'bout option D: all of the above."

"Why were all three there?"

“The way Frandsen put it, Sydney Grimm and the two Macys got into some demonic voodoo shit in order to attack Ms. White. White was apparently the 'stuck up bitch' girl that harassed everyone to the point then tried to take their own lives.”

“Is that where she would have gotten the idea to take her own life?”

“Probably. Dakota basically took matters into his own hands to remind Kristen of what she was doing, well, more along the lines of what her deceased brother would've thought. It was really a sad story, about to get a whole lot worse.”

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah, why?”

“You just referred to Frandsen by his first name.”

“The kid scares the hell out of me, but even I got to admit he is good at what he does.”

“Apparently so. But please continue with the story.”

“Right...”

He took a deep breath before taking another drink from his soda before continuing. The air in the room seemed to turn heavier. I've heard countless horror stories, it was all part of the job. Every now and then, one could easily hear about incidents too freaky to really write off as drug related; hence why it would be safe to say a majority of cops were at least open to the idea of the supernatural.

“When the girls arrived on the scene, I tried to radio into dispatch about what was going on. Interference made our radios damn near useless. Naturally, they



were on edge once they saw we had Sydney Grimm cuffed and bound to a chair. Dakota took things further by digging out some rope and tied her to a pipe heater that was in the room.

"The girls immediately panicked when they saw what was going on. Understandably so, the poor kid looked horrible. As soon as the ritual started, things got worse."

"How so?"

"Ever burn yourself and get the blisters that start to bubble after a day? Imagine the bubbles the size of baseballs and instead of puss, there is blood that smells like raw sewage. Imagine screaming that sounds like mutilated cats at every second, at such a high pitch windows shatters."

"Fuck..."

"The neighbors came over threatening to call the police, obviously too fucking stupid to tell our squad cars were there. The ones that did, tried to threaten police brutality lawsuits. Soon they started to run back into their homes. We had to focus on the Grimm daughter, otherwise, things would've turned to even more bloodshed. Kristen immediately became distraught. Dakota kept trying to push her forward, constantly reminded her if she didn't focus more people could end up dead."

"You're kidding..."

"He was rough. The bastard started turning into a drill sergeant during the heat of the moment. All of his little girlfriends started getting upset with him but they held out. I almost socked him a couple times but once I

saw the condition the Grimm girl was actually improving.

“Her voice started to change into that of a normal teen girl, the blood-blister-things cleared up, she started to look healthy! Things looked up, the exorcism looked like it was working. Then the fire started.”

“I saw the photos. The marshal couldn't ID the cause.”

“It is because spontaneous combustion is still considered a myth. The fucking flames came out of nowhere, Dakota said it was the 'demon's' last stand.”

“What?”

“The fire started by itself and went out in a flash. But the room got fucking hot! I swore I saw metal fucking melt. Something was not right. But whatever was going on seemed to improve. The situation was getting better.”

“Except two girls are dead and a third is in the hospital.”

“Once things ended, everyone was distraught. That type of thing takes a toll. I never realize how much of a spiritual warfare it was, let alone believed it was real. I thought this shit was fantasy.” The room around us became hotter.

Marks started to get nervous. “Feels like the damn thermostat is busted again,” I said.

A shadow appeared inside the room, one that made both Marks and I jump.

“Keep telling yourself that, you fat pigs,” it growled.

“Who the fuck are you?” I yelled.

“Simmons, that is Kristen Whitel!” Marks screamed.

“I thought the poor girl slit her wrists and hung herself!”

“That is what I wanted you to think...”

Marks and I drew our service weapons and opened fire. The image of the girl still haunts us to this day. The others in our department don't believe the incident ever happened. But to this day it scares the shit out of us, on top of the random chaos that has been happening lately. But the one thing that bothers me the most, is what the demon girl said.

“Bother any of my sons again, you will be entrapped in the deepest pits I can find.”

## **The Rift Beneath Denver**

The air deep beneath Denver's surface was heavy with the hum of energy, punctuated by the rhythmic clatter of keys as Dr. Elian Reyes worked feverishly on his terminal. The room, a sterile labyrinth of gleaming metal and cables, housed the crown jewel of a shadowy organization known only as Division Theta—a teleportation device they called *The Rift Engine*.

Above ground, the apocalypse raged. Reports of supernatural entities—demons, specters, and unnameable horrors—clashing in a chaotic war had spread like wildfire. The battle for the remnants of humanity left the world teetering on the brink. Below, Elian and his team pushed forward, believing their device could provide escape or, perhaps, salvation.

Elian wiped sweat from his brow as he checked the sequence one last time. The Rift Engine's central chamber pulsed with a flickering blue light, like the heartbeat of a dying star. His voice crackled over the comm system.

"Activating dimensional tether in three... two... one..."

The hum escalated to a roar. The chamber walls shimmered, and the air warped as if reality itself were being stretched too thin. Suddenly, the light flared, blinding, and an immense pressure crushed Elian's chest. A scream tore from his lips as he was yanked forward into the vortex.

And then—nothing.

Elían awoke in a void. Shapes and colors swirled around him like the fragments of a shattered dream. His mind struggled to comprehend the space—a realm of overlapping dimensions, each pressing against his consciousness like foreign memories.

"Where am I?" he murmured, his voice swallowed by the silence.

A shadowy figure emerged from the chaos, eyes glowing faintly. It reached out, touching Elían's shoulder with a hand that felt both solid and ephemeral. The figure whispered, "They're waiting for you."

Back in the facility, alarms blared. The Rift Engine had collapsed into an unstable vortex, and the base was under siege. The reinforced blast doors rattled as supernatural forces clawed at the perimeter. Strange creatures materialized in the corridors—shadowy humanoids with eyes that burned like embers. Security personnel were overwhelmed, their screams echoing through the halls.

Leading the assault was a man clad in black, his presence commanding despite the chaos. His name, whispered by survivors with equal parts reverence and fear, was Dakota Frandsen. His reputation preceded him, though none had expected him to lead an army of the otherworldly.

Dakota strode into the main chamber where the Rift Engine's remnants sputtered and sparked. His team, a ragtag group of mystics, hunters, and ex-soldiers,

moved with precision, securing the area as Dakota approached the pulsating void where Elian had vanished.

“Shut it down,” one of his lieutenants said, eyes darting nervously to the unstable device.

“No,” Dakota replied, his tone resolute. “We wait.”

Elian felt the pull again, a violent snap as the void spat him back into the world. He collapsed onto the cold, metallic floor of the chamber, gasping for breath. Around him, the air was thick with tension. He looked up, his vision swimming, and locked eyes with Dakota.

“You’re late,” Dakota said, a ghost of a smirk tugging at his lips.

“Who—?” Elian stammered, but Dakota silenced him with a raised hand.

“You’ve been playing with things you don’t understand, Doc. That Rift Engine? It’s not just teleportation. It’s a doorway—one that doesn’t care about borders, dimensions, or the creatures waiting on the other side.”

Elian’s heart raced as the weight of Dakota’s words settled over him. “I was trying to help... to create a way out.”

“You opened the wrong door,” Dakota said, his gaze darkening. “And now the things you’ve invited in want to stay.”

The room shook as a deafening roar reverberated through the facility. One of Dakota’s team members yelled, “They’re breaching the lower levels!”

Dakota turned to his team. “Hold them off. I’ll deal with this.” He grabbed Elian by the arm, dragging him

toward the console. "You're fixing this, Doc. Right here, right now."

"But I don't know if—"

"You *will*," Dakota snapped.

Together, they worked frantically, Elian's hands trembling as he input new commands to stabilize the device. As the Rift Engine roared back to life, the creatures began to pour into the chamber. Dakota's team held their ground, their weapons blazing with otherworldly energy.

The vortex swirled violently, its glow shifting from chaotic blues to a calm, steady white. The creatures hesitated, their forms flickering as if caught between realities.

"Now!" Dakota shouted.

Elian slammed his palm onto the activation panel. The light engulfed the chamber, swallowing the creatures and the vortex alike. When the light receded, the room was eerily quiet, save for the ragged breathing of the survivors.

Elian slumped against the console, exhausted. "Is it over?"

Dakota gave him a long, measured look. "For now."

As Dakota turned to leave, Elian called after him. "Who are you?"

Dakota paused, his silhouette framed by the flickering emergency lights. "You know who I am, Doc."

And with that, he vanished into the shadows, leaving Elian alone with the weight of what had been un-

leashed—and the lingering question of what lay beyond the Rift.



# Passages from Universe 3

## **The Forging of Jonathon Konstintano**

The wind howled across the rolling hills of Wales, carrying the scent of damp earth and bitter regret. Fourteen-year-old Jonathon Konstintano ran through the dense woodland, his thin coat doing little to protect him from the icy chill of the autumn night. His legs ached, his lungs burned, but he didn't stop. He couldn't stop. If he stopped, the memories would catch up to him.

Behind him, the flames that consumed his childhood home still flickered against the horizon, their glow dimming with the distance. His father's face haunted him—twisted in rage, red with fury. Then his mother's, pale and pleading. And finally, the crash. The terrible, screeching crash.

Jonathon clenched his fists, the sting of his nails biting into his palms as his steps faltered. **I didn't mean it. I didn't mean to...** The thought played over and over in his head, but it brought no comfort. He sank to the base of an ancient oak tree, its gnarled

roots curling around him like an embrace. For the first time since the accident, he allowed himself to cry.

He wasn't sure how long he sat there, his tears soaking into the mossy ground. Hours, perhaps. The cold began to creep into his bones when a sound broke the silence.

"Lost, are we?"

The voice was deep and weathered, like the groan of old wood. Jonathon scrambled to his feet, his heart racing. The speaker emerged from the shadows, an elderly man cloaked in tattered robes that seemed to shift in the dim light. His face was angular, his beard long and streaked with silver, but it was his eyes that held Jonathon captive. They glimmered with an otherworldly intensity, as though they could see straight into his soul.

"Who are you?" Jonathon demanded, his voice trembling.

The man tilted his head, a hint of amusement curling his lips. "Who I am matters little. The question is, who are you, boy?"

Jonathon took a step back. "Stay away. I don't want any trouble."

The man chuckled, a low and rumbling sound. "Trouble follows you, doesn't it? I can see it in you. The storm, the chaos, the fire."

Jonathon froze. "What do you mean?"

"Magic," the man said simply. He stepped closer, his eyes gleaming. "It's inside you. Wild and untamed. You don't even know what you've done, do you?"

Jonathon's heart skipped a beat. "I didn't... I didn't mean to—"

The man held up a hand. "Easy, boy. I'm not here to judge. But if you don't learn to control that power of yours, it'll destroy you."

The words struck Jonathon like a blow. He stared at the man, his mind reeling. Was that what had happened? Was it magic—**his** magic—that caused the crash?

The man extended a gnarled hand. "Come with me. I can teach you. Help you make sense of it."

Jonathon hesitated. He didn't trust the man, not entirely. But he had nowhere else to go, and deep down, he knew he needed answers. Slowly, he reached out and took the man's hand.

Magnus's home was deep within the forest, a crumbling stone cottage surrounded by ancient oaks and twisted brambles. Inside, it was a world unlike anything Jonathon had ever seen. Shelves overflowed with books bound in leather and gold. Strange symbols glowed faintly on the walls, and the air was thick with the scent of herbs and incense.

Magnus wasted no time. "If you're going to stay here, you'll earn your keep," he said gruffly, handing Jonathon a broom. "Clean first. Then we'll talk magic."

Jonathon obeyed, unsure if he had made the right choice. But as the days turned into weeks, he began to understand the old man's ways. Magnus was a harsh teacher, quick to criticize but just as quick to praise when Jonathon succeeded. He taught Jonathon the ba-

sics of magic: focusing his mind, channeling his energy, and understanding the delicate balance between power and control.

The first time Jonathon lit a candle with a single thought, he felt a spark of hope. The first time he conjured a protective barrier, he felt pride. But the guilt never left him.

One night, as they sat by the fire, Jonathon couldn't keep it in any longer. "I killed them," he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

Magnus looked up from his book, his expression unreadable.

"My parents," Jonathon continued, tears streaming down his face. "It was my fault. I got so angry, and then... the crash. The fire."

Magnus leaned back in his chair, stroking his beard. "You were a child," he said finally. "And from what you've told me, they weren't exactly saints."

"That doesn't matter," Jonathon snapped. "I should've been better. Stronger."

Magnus's gaze softened. "Magic doesn't care about guilt, lad. It's a force, like fire or water. It's up to you how you use it." He leaned forward, his eyes intense. "You've got a choice, Jonathon. You can let the past chain you, or you can let it forge you into something stronger."

Jonathon stared into the fire, Magnus's words echoing in his mind.

Years passed, and under Magnus's guidance, Jonathon grew into a skilled and formidable occultist.

He traveled the world, seeking knowledge, helping those in need, and confronting the darkness both within himself and in the world. The name Jonathon Konstantino became known in occult circles, whispered with respect and a touch of fear.

But no matter how far he went or how powerful he became, he never forgot the boy who had run into the forest on that cold Welsh night. The guilt remained, not as a burden, but as a reminder: of what he had lost, and of what he had to protect.

## **The Darkest Betrayal**

The mist hung thick over the English countryside as Zariah Zamora stepped carefully along the narrow dirt path. Her boots crunched on the gravel, the sounds muffled by the dense fog that veiled the rolling hills and gnarled trees. She had spent months here, piecing together fragments of her ancestry, her psychic gift guiding her to places she could feel were significant, even if she couldn't explain why.

The village of Blackthorn seemed unassuming at first glance—a quaint collection of stone cottages and winding lanes—but Zariah's instincts told her it held secrets. Her dreams had been haunted since her arrival, filled with fleeting images of a shadowy figure and the cries of children. Tonight, she followed her intuition into the woods, drawn by an unseen force she didn't entirely trust.

As she rounded a bend in the path, her heart skipped a beat. Ahead, a small girl stood frozen, her tear-streaked face pale in the moonlight. Looming over her was an elderly man draped in tattered robes, his bony hands raised as if conducting some unseen ritual.

"You will not scream again, child," the man hissed, his voice like gravel. "The offering must be made."

"Get away from her!" Zariah's voice rang out, startling them both.

The man turned, his sharp, sunken eyes narrowing as they fell on her. "This does not concern you, woman. Leave, or you'll share her fate."

Zariah stepped forward, her pulse quickening. She could feel the dark energy radiating from him, a festering, malevolent force that made her skin crawl. "I said, let her go."

The man sneered, his hands crackling with an unnatural light. "You've no idea what you're meddling in."

Zariah didn't wait for him to strike. With a swift motion, she extended her hands, summoning her psychic energy. A shimmering shield of golden light erupted between the man and the child, forcing him back. The little girl scrambled to her feet and ran to Zariah, clutching her leg.

"You dare challenge Magnus?" he growled, his voice reverberating unnaturally.

Zariah's heart skipped a beat. **Magnus. The Magnus.** She had heard rumors of this man being a wise teacher in the occult, but the man that stood before her was nothing but a disgusting predator.

The air between them shimmered as Magnus hurled a bolt of dark energy at Zariah. She countered with her own force, the impact shaking the ground beneath their feet. For a moment, they were locked in a battle of wills, the surrounding forest illuminated by flashes of light and shadow.

Then, from the darkness, a familiar voice cut through the chaos.

“Magnus! What in the bloody shit you doing?! Stop this!”

A Welshman emerged from the trees. Short dark hair, green eyes darkened by betrayal and rage, “What in the fuck are you doing?”

Magnus turned to face him, his expression softening just enough to reveal a flicker of guilt. “Jonathon, you don’t understand. The entity demands sacrifices. It’s the only way to maintain the balance.”

Jonathon’s stomach churned. “The balance? You’re killing children! That’s not balance—that’s evil! You twisted fuck!”

Magnus’s gaze hardened. “You’re too naïve to see the bigger picture. Knightmare’s power is beyond comprehension. Without these offerings, the darkness will consume us all.”

“Liar,” Zariah spat. “You’re feeding it for your own gain. You’ve sold your soul, and you’re trying to drag others down with you.”

Jonathon’s hands trembled as he took a step forward. “You were supposed to guide me. To teach me how to fight the darkness, not serve it.”

Magnus raised his hands again, but before he could strike, Jonathon unleashed a surge of energy, his magic fueled by anger and betrayal. Zariah joined him, their powers intertwining as they pressed Magnus back.

The ground beneath them quaked as a portal opened, a swirling vortex of shadow and flame. Magnus fought against their combined magic, his screams echoing through the forest.



"Jonathon, listen to me!" he cried. "You'll regret this. Nightmare will come for you, too!"

Jonathon's voice was steady, his resolve unshakable. "Then I'll be ready."

With a final push, they forced Magnus into the portal. It closed with a deafening roar, leaving only silence in its wake. The little girl had long since fled to safety, leaving Jonathon and Zariah alone in the clearing. The fog had lifted, revealing a clear night sky scattered with stars.

"Thank you," Jonathon said, his voice heavy with exhaustion.

Zariah shook her head. "You don't need to thank me. He was your fight as much as mine."

He turned to her, his expression softening. "I've lost so much tonight. My mentor, my trust... everything I thought I knew."

Zariah placed a hand on his shoulder. "Then, Jon, build something new. Something stronger."

For the first time, Jonathon allowed himself to smile. "I think I'll need help with that."

Zariah smiled back, her eyes glinting with determination. "Good thing I'm not going anywhere."

Together, they walked back toward the village, their bond forged in fire and shadow. The battle was over, but they both knew the war had just begun.

"Before we go anything further, what's your name, darling?" Jonathon choked.

"Don't call me, 'darling,' you haven't earned it, yet," Zariah smirked.

Jonathon raised his hands in playful surrender, "My apologies. I'm just trying to be a gentleman and remember a pretty lady's name."

Zariah rolled her eyes as Jonathon winked, the seeds of their relationship taking root for a journey that may just defy their already, "open" perspective on the true functions behind the world they knew; and perhaps worlds beyond.

## The Echo

The candlelight in Johnathon Konstintano's study flickered, casting long, dancing shadows across the walls lined with ancient tomes and esoteric artifacts. A storm raged outside, but Johnathon, the ever-disciplined occultist, barely noticed. He sat cross-legged on the wooden floor, his eyes shut and mind focused, his aura resonating with the subtle vibrations of the unseen.

It was then that he heard it.

A voice, faint and distant, yet impossibly clear, spoke directly into his mind: *"John, can you hear me?"*

His eyes snapped open, their deep emerald glow betraying his heightened awareness. The message wasn't from this plane, nor any of the usual spiritual realms he had explored. This was something entirely different—multiversal.

"Zariah!" he called, his voice calm but firm.

Zariah Zamora appeared in the doorway, her silver hair flowing like a waterfall down her back, her violet eyes brimming with latent power. As a skilled psychic and occultist—and his equal in every way—she could feel the disturbance in the air before he even spoke.

"Something's reached out to you, hasn't it?" she asked, stepping into the room.

He nodded. "Not just something—someone. They know my name."

Zariah tilted her head, intrigued. “Do we have a link?”

Johnathon gestured for her to join him on the floor. “Let’s find out.”

Together, they performed a synchronistic ritual. Zariah’s psychic energy acted as a receiver, amplifying Johnathon’s magical focus. The air shimmered as their combined power stretched beyond their reality, seeking the source of the message.

Then, like a thread through a needle, Zariah caught it. “Got it,” she whispered, her voice strained but steady. “The message comes from someone named... Dakota Frandsen. He’s experimenting with multiversal communication—using something called the Metatron frequencies.”

Johnathon raised an eyebrow. “Metatron frequencies? Clever bastard. Either this Dakota is the luckiest man alive, or he’s stronger than he realizes.”

Zariah smirked. “I’m leaning toward lucky. But what’s his goal?”

Johnathon focused, probing the faint echo of Dakota’s intent. “He’s looking for mentors and allies for a coming battle. Whatever this is, it’s serious.”

Zariah nodded. “Then we should respond. But the signal is unstable. How do we make it stick?”

Johnathon gestured toward an obsidian crystal on his desk. “Focus your energy there. I’ll anchor it. Speak clearly, and he’ll hear you.”

Zariah took a deep breath, channeling her psychic essence into the crystal. With Johnathon’s magic sta-

bilizing the connection, she sent her reply: *"If you can hear me, Konstintano wants you."*

The message shot through the multiverse like a ripple across a pond, reaching Dakota Frandsen's dimension. At that exact moment, Dakota, lying in bed, let out a frustrated sigh. His phone, running a sleep-monitoring app, recorded the ambient noise in his room. He assumed his experiment had failed, but just as sleep began to claim him, the faint, ethereal voice of Zariah echoed through the recording: *"If you can hear me, Konstintano wants you."*

He bolted upright, scrambling to replay the recording. A shiver ran down his spine as he recognized the supernatural precision of the message. His experiment had worked.

Back in Johnathon's study, Zariah opened her eyes, her energy depleted but her spirit triumphant. "The message is sent. He'll know we're here."

Johnathon leaned back, a rare smile crossing his face. "Good. Let's see if Dakota's ready for what he's asking. The multiverse doesn't send messages without reason."

Zariah chuckled softly. "And you don't answer without a challenge. This might be fun."

As the storm outside waned, the pair prepared for what was to come, knowing their paths had now intertwined with Dakota Frandsen's—and with whatever battle lay ahead.

